The KHAKI BOYS ON THE WAY

By

CAPT. GORDON BATES

Grandma
to Paul

Dec 25-1924

Lee Anne Castle

THE KHAKI BOYS ON THE WAY

OR

Doing Their Bit on Sea and Land

By

CAPT. GORDON BATES

Author of "The Khaki Boys at Camp Sterling"
"The Khaki Boys at the Front," etc.

ILLUSTRATED

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THE KHAKI BOYS SERIES

By CAPT. GORDON BATES

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THE KHAKI BOYS AT CAMP STERLING
or Training for the Big Fight in France

THE KHAKI BOYS ON THE WAY
or Doing Their Bit on Sea and Land

THE KHAKI BOYS AT THE FRONT
or Shoulder to Shoulder in the Trenches

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THE KHAKI BOYS ON THE WAY

CHAPTER I

AN UNEXPECTED HONOR

"ONE more day's drill for Uncle Sammy!" exclaimed Bob Dalton, as he carefully put away his rifle and slipped out of his heavy olive-drab overcoat. "Whew, but my legs are tired! It's no fun galumphing along in the snow. A hard step and a cold day!"

"Quite right, my man." Jimmy Blaise mischievously took on the tone of a certain second lieutenant at Camp Sterling, noted for his patronizing manner.

"Why, *good afternoon,* Lieutenant!" Bob simulated ardent enthusiasm. "So glad to have you with us. I'd salute you, but my hand's tired."

"Don't mention it." Jimmy grinned sardonically. "Say, that shave-tail makes me laugh,"

he added, dropping into a decided Jimmy Blaise tone. "I drove him to Glenwood yesterday, and he kept telling me about every other minute how to run the car. The joke of it is he can't drive at all. That's why I had to go along."

"Something funny happened to him this morning," smiled Roger Barlow. "One of those French officers was drilling some of the drafted men in bayonet practice. I wasn't there, but I heard about it. The lieutenant was there, though. The fellows had just gone through with a maneuver, and the lieutenant said, in that cold, starchy way he has: 'Men, have you any questions to ask?' One rookie said, as solemn as a judge, 'I'd like to know, sir, if when we've tried our best to stab the enemy from the front and can't, then can we go around behind him and stab him from the back?' "

"Oh, wow!" rejoiced Jimmy. "Some question!"

"Honest Injun, did he say that?" Bob laughed immoderately.

"He did. What's more, he meant it. They say the fellows yelled like sixty, and the French officer laughed, too. But the lieutenant was sore. He thought the rookie was trying to kid him."

"Did he jump the fellow?" queried Jimmy with interest.

"No, he just glared at him. Then the French officer, a fine man, explained to the rookie, as

sober as you please, just why it wasn't being done much in the big war. That rookie'll never hear the last of it. The fellows will josh him about it for a long while to come."

"Seems ages since we were 'just rookies,'" mused Bob. "I'll never forget the way I felt when I first got into my uniform. And Iggy. Do you remember what a fuss he made trying to put his leggins on smooth?"

"I do," rejoined Jimmy. "I had to lace 'em for him."

"We've been at Sterling almost six months," Roger announced, after counting on his fingers. "I thought last week when we had the party at Tremont for Schnitz that we'd be gone from here before this. Maybe we'll get the good word at roll call to-morrow morning."

"I have an idea that we will," nodded Bob. "The Sarge has been going around all day with that wise look he always wears when he's going to spring something."

"There's a bunch of drafted men due in camp to-morrow. Maybe Company E's men'll be moving out to give 'em room," speculated Jimmy. "I'm glad Dad and Mother came up to see us last Sunday. The only thing that bothered me was having to go without seeing 'em again. Guess I must be more than lucky. Not many fellows have had a chance to get a look at their home folks at the last minute."

"You're lucky to have 'em for parents, if

you never had another day's luck," Bob assured him. "You're not such a bad old scout, yourself, Blazes. I kind of like you. You take after Dad and Mother. Now duck your head and say, 'Oh, I'm not so much.'" Bob teasingly referred to a pet mannerism of Jimmy's.

"Oh, can it," retorted Jimmy, flicking at Bob the rag, with which he had been cleaning his rifle. Returned from drill, he had immediately busied himself with this task. "You'd better quit stringing me, and give your rifle the once over. Look at Rodge and me, both busy little workers."

"Not now. It's almost time for Retreat. I'm going to reserve that pleasure until after mess. What's happened to Iggy? Haven't seen him since Assembly. Oh, I forgot, he's finishing his guard detail. It's his first start at it. Wonder how he likes it. I don't envy him on a day like this."

"He won't mind the weather. He's too happy over having been picked out for the detail. He's certainly come up in appearance. He's a dandy-looking Sammy *now*." Jimmy smiled reminiscently. He was thinking of the sorry figure the Polish boy cut during his first days at Camp Sterling.

Those who have read "The Khaki Boys at Camp Sterling" will recall the manner in which Jimmy Blaise, a college lad, and Roger Barlow, a young bread-winner, met in a crowded street,

where they had paused to listen to an oration delivered from a recruiting wagon. Both eager to offer their services to their country, they had driven to the recruiting station in Jimmy's roadster, and there taken the first steps toward enlistment in the National Army. Accepted by Uncle Sam, they had, in company with half a hundred other recruits, left their home city one sunny afternoon in late summer for Camp Sterling, there to begin training for active service in the great European war.

It was when on the train bound for camp that they had first met and become acquainted with Bob Dalton, a young newspaper reporter, and Ignace Pulinski, a Polish boy, both of whom claimed the same destination as themselves. Each coming from a different walk in life, the four young patriots had, nevertheless, found much in common at first meeting. It was due to Ignace's solemn declaration, "Brothers all," that they had laughingly agreed to call themselves the four Brothers.

Later, when they had passed the final medical examination, and taken the Oath of Allegiance to the United States, they had been assigned to Company E, 509th Infantry, and had straightway become bunkies. How well they lived up to their title of the four Brothers has already been told. Ever loyal to one another, they had shared their pleasures and stood sturdily together in times of stress.

Now, after several months of hard and constant drill, mingled with considerable exciting adventure, the four Brothers stood, as it were, on the threshold, their ears alertly trained to catch the welcome call that would send them speeding along the Glory Road in a hike that would presently land them in the trenches of far-off France.

"Yes, Iggy's a sure-enough Regular now," agreed Bob. "You can look for some good work from him when he gets 'Over There.' He has the spirit of a Kosciusko, and the strength and ferocity of a tiger. I pity some of those Boches when he goes Over the Top and gets a whack at 'em."

"He'll get either a knock-out or a medal of honor about the first thing he does," prophesied Jimmy. "Let's hope it will be the medal."

"I can just imagine him being decorated," grinned Bob. "Those round, blue eyes of his would open as wide as saucers, and he'd probably say, 'So-o-o!'

"Reminds me of a story I once heard about a captain in the National Guard, who was due to get a fine sword from his men at a big military affair they were giving in the Armory. One of the fellows in the company was to make a presentation speech. The captain knew he was going to get the sword, so he had to get a speech ready, too.

"Just before the presentation the captain was

off the stage in one anteroom reciting his speech, and the other fellow was going over his on the other side. When they met on the stage with the sword, the fellow who had the sword got stage fright and forgot every word he'd learned. So he just stammered out, 'Here—here—it—is!' That upset the captain so that his little speech flew away, too, and he said, 'Oh—er—is that it?' "

A burst of laughter greeted the tale. Bob himself grinned broadly. The little anecdote he had just related had always seemed very funny to him.

"I imagine it's a true story," he said. "That's about the way such things happen."

Roger and Jimmy smilingly agreed with him.

Retreat, followed shortly by call to mess, left the trio little time for further conversation. Once in the mess hall, however, their tongues wagged busily, as they fell hungrily upon their supper. All being in the pink of condition, the cold weather merely served to sharpen their appetites.

Supper over, Jimmy took leave of his bunkies, and set off for the garage. He had been detailed to drive Major Stearns to Glenwood that evening. He was thinking a trifle wistfully, as he brought the car around to headquarters, that this would probably be his last trip as the K. O.'s chauffeur. Despite the difference in rank, a real affection had sprung up between the two.

After his own father, Jimmy regarded the major as the next finest man in the whole world. Major Stearns, whose only son had died of fever when about Jimmy's age, had come to look upon Jimmy in fatherly fashion.

Military etiquette forbade either to voice any such sentiment, yet each understood the other. Somehow, it did not greatly surprise Jimmy when, on returning to camp, the major requested him to come to headquarters for a moment after he had returned the car to the garage.

"For once, my boy, we'll dispense with military form," was the major's greeting, as Jimmy entered the K. O.'s office, bereft of occupants other than themselves. "I'm going to imagine that I'm talking to my own son."

The major sighed. His steel blue eyes rested very tenderly on the boyish sergeant. "You understand why, I'm sure."

"Yes, sir." Jimmy's heart beat a trifle faster. He understood only too well.

"First, I wish to give you something to show my appreciation of your faithful service to me."

Opening a drawer of his desk, the major took from it a black leather case, and tendered it to Jimmy.

This time Jimmy *was* surprised. Decidedly, he had not expected this. His hands shook, and a mist swam before his gray eyes, as he accepted the case, and thanked the donor in unsteady tones.

"I'd—like to—look—at it now—if I may, sir," he stammered.

"I wish you would," the K. O. answered heartily. In fact, he appeared to derive signal pleasure from watching Jimmy examine his new treasure. The leather case contained a kodak, of beautiful workmanship and fine lens.

"I wish I could put into words what I'm thinking, sir," Jimmy managed to say at last. "I've always wanted to tell you how much I appreciate your goodness to me. I never believed I'd have this wonderful chance to say it, though. I thank you for that even more than for this splendid gift."

"You are very welcome, my boy," responded the major, his usually crisp tones very gentle. "I've watched you from the first, and seen you develop from a fine, straightforward lad into a conscientious, efficient soldier. I have never met your father and mother, but I thank them for giving such a son as you to the Service. I never had but one son. He died several years ago. In many ways you remind me of him. I thought you might like to know it."

"It has made me very happy, sir." Jimmy's face registered the fact.

"Your hardest work is still ahead of you," continued the major. "You will soon be called upon to meet conditions which will demand renewed fortitude, obedience and loyalty to the Colors. I have no fear that you will show your-

self to be other than a true soldier. I wish, however, to impress upon you particularly the necessity for keeping a cool, level head in the face of emergency, a discreet silence at all times and in all places, and the courage to cleave to the right under the most trying circumstances.

"These qualities outrank mere physical bravery. A cool, discreet, upright man will force the respect of those ranking either lower or higher than himself. Remember that, won't you?

"A word, too, regarding your bunkies, Barlow, Dalton and Pulinski. They deserve commendation. Stick to them, and you will be found always in good company. That is all, I believe." Rising, the major held out his hand. "Good luck to you, my boy, and Godspeed."

"I wish you the same, sir." Jimmy's hand met the major's. "I'll remember all you've said to me, and try hard to live up to it. I'd do my best for my country without a word from you. But just knowing that you've talked to me as you would have to your own son makes me feel as if I'd go through anything rather than disappoint you. I hope we'll both live to see the end of this war. If I come through it a whole man, I've made up my mind to stay in the Army and study for an officer's commission."

"That is good news," approved the K. O. "I hope, too, that we shall both be spared to see you win it."

His changeful face alight with boyish devo-

tion, Jimmy said an informal good-night. Once more the soldier in the presence of his commander, he saluted and briskly left the office, the major's gift tucked under one arm. Only the pressure of that square leather case against his overcoat informed him that he had not been dreaming. He had been the recipient of an honor such as falls to the lot of perhaps one soldier in ten thousand.

CHAPTER II

THE TIME TO "DO AND DARE"

"WE'RE going over! We're going over!" chanted Bob Dalton softly, as he delved industriously among his personal effects. Bob's belongings were many and varied, in consequence, he was in a fine stew regarding what to pack and what not to pack.

It was the evening following Jimmy's unexpected call on Major Stearns. Morning of that day had brought to Company E's barracks the welcome order to pack. It had included all those still left of the men who had arrived at Camp Sterling about the same time as the four Brothers. Only a few, who had lately been assigned to Company E barracks, were to remain behind. With the arrival of a large body of drafted men daily expected, the two barracks would again be filled to capacity.

Noon of the next day would see a detachment of about five hundred men selected from a num-

ber of barracks, besides those of Company E, started on their way to Camp Marvin, many miles farther south. It was generally understood among the prospective travelers that their stay in Camp Marvin would not be of long duration. Just how long none had the remotest idea. All hoped, however, that there would be small delay in starting the expedition on its way across the Atlantic. The prevalent opinion voiced by them was, "The sooner we *go* over, the sooner the war'll *be* over."

"I don't see how I ever managed to get so much stuff into so little space." Bob stopped singing to shake a despondent head at the array of articles strung all over his cot.

"I can't take half this truck, and it's all werry waluable to Bobby. I'll have to leave most of my books behind, and it breaks my heart. Most of 'em are on special subjects, too. Some of 'em I picked up at that old book shop in Tremont, and some I brought when we went to the big town on furloughs. I'll have to give 'em to the fellows here, I guess. I'll be chewed if I'll part with my old black Dic, though. It goes with me clean Over the Top if it comes to that. You can't pry Bobby loose from it."

"You might use it to wallop a Boche over the head, if you got that far with it," satirized Jimmy. "Letting the whole English language loose on his cocoanut would probably finish him."

"We hope so," grinned Bob, lovingly patting the proposed deadly weapon.

"Suppose we take all the stuff we don't want and pile it on one end of my cot," suggested Roger. "If we get through before Call to Quarters, we can hand it out to the new men. Most of 'em are first-rate fellows, and they'll put it to good use after we're gone."

Adopting this suggestion, a good-sized heap of miscellaneous articles soon decorated one end of Roger's cot. Besides books, Bob's contributions to it consisted largely of much blank paper and numerous note-books. Due to his habit of jotting down an account or description of anything of interest, which he happened to run across, he had an amazing amount of these last, mostly paper-bound.

The majority of them were unused save for a few of the first pages of each. Bought while on numerous trips to Tremont or Glenwood, Bob would use them to suit the moment's purpose, then afterward tuck them away. Now he spent a busy session in going over them and ripping out his notes, all of which he intended to make into one package and forward in the morning to Mrs. Blaise. When visiting "her boys" on the previous Sunday, she had offered to take care of them for Bob against his return home after the war.

"We must get everything packed to-night," declared Jimmy decidedly. "As long as we

don't have to drill to-morrow morning, I want to put in the time writing home."

"That's the idea," approved Bob. "What about Iggy's stuff, though? He'll want to write to his mother to-morrow, you know. He'll be back here just in time for Taps and that's all. He won't be able to pack a thing to-night."

"His traps are just about ready," informed Jimmy. "He's never been a trash gatherer. Besides, he's been fidgeting for a week about 'the ready get.'"

"Then he's all right. My going-away traps are all assembled. I'm going to begin packing them."

By "going-away traps," Roger referred to a selection of such personal belongings as could be easily placed either in his haversack, which he would carry with him, or with his surplus kit.

In spite of Bob's assertion that he was too much excited over quitting the camp to sleep a wink that night, he, as well as his bunkies, put in a good night's rest. Next morning, though none of the four would admit it, a feeling of sadness tugged at their hearts, as they lined up for roll call in front of Company E's barracks. It was like leaving home all over again. They had grown really attached to the cheerless wooden structure that had sheltered them for so many months. Since the exodus of Bixton and Eldridge from the squad room, peace and quiet had prevailed. It was a comfort, however, to re-

flect that most of "the fellows" were going along with them.

Free after breakfast to spend the last few hours in camp in winding up their personal affairs, the four Brothers, accompanied by Franz Schnitzel, promptly returned to barracks to write their home letters. Owing to the fact of their near departure, they had been ordered to keep to the company street, and this precluded any farewell trips about camp or to their old standby, the "Y."

It was exactly one o'clock when the departing detachment marched to the station to the stirring strains of "The Salute to the Colors," played by an accompanying regimental band. Although the ground was white with snow, the sun shone dazzlingly down upon the young defenders, as they swung along over the snow-packed road. Many recalled the day when it had been a ribbon of yellow dust stretching ahead of them toward the beginning of a new experience. Now it had changed to glistening white, and led away from the old life to experiences infinitely stranger and more exciting.

The Khaki Boys had passed triumphantly through their first hard period of apprenticeship. From rookies they had been transformed into Regulars. All knew that their training had really only just begun. At Camp Marvin it would be continued with renewed vigor. Arrived in France, they would be put through a

new course of sprouts to fit them for active service in the trenches. Many weeks might elapse before they would reach the front and hear the thunder of the enemy's guns. On the other hand, it might be their destiny to undergo only a short period of training, and thus quickly reach the firing line.

It was all too indefinite to admit of more than guess work. Yet youth is so constituted as to revel in the mystery of things. The charm of the unknown inspires it to plunge recklessly ahead, caring little which road it travels, provided that road leads to adventure. It is only as staid middle age approaches that the will to do and dare is strangled by the will to pause and count the cost.

So it was with the gallant company of soldier boys, who kept step to the enlivening strains of the band. The time had come "to do and dare." Above the blare of the brass, they fancied they could actually hear Uncle Sam calling, "Boys, I need you Over There!"

CHAPTER III

ON THE WAY AT LAST

"IT'S a long way to Tipperary," yawned Bob Dalton. "Trains are all right in their way. They get you where you want to go. Just the same, I'm not strong for them. The minute I hop on one I begin to look forward to quitting it cold. Here it is only three o'clock and Bobby's restless already."

"I don't mind traveling. I like to go to new places, and see new things," rejoined Roger. "This trip will be the longest I've ever made."

"Show me something new," grumbled Bob. "I know every landmark from here to the big town. Wish we'd lay over there. I'd like to butt in on the *Chronicle* gang and surprise 'em. Blazes sent a wire to his folks. I'll bet they'll be down to the train for a last look at us. Hope they are."

"So do I. It would be just like Mrs. Blaise to hunt up Iggy's mother and bring her along. That would surprise old Iggy."

"I'll bet she will." Bob looked mildly interested. "It's a great thing to have home folks. You and I are lucky to have Mrs. B. for a foster-mother."

"I know it. We owe her a lot, and Jimmy, too. It seems a long time since we all got together in that train that took us to Sterling, doesn't it?"

"Yep. Wake up, Iggy." Bob dealt the drowsing figure beside him a resounding slap on the shoulder. Still tired from guard detail of the day before, Ignace had leaned back against the seat, and closed his eyes for a cat nap.

"Do you remember what you said the first time I ever hit you a love tap?" Bob asked, as the Pole sat up, blinking.

"Ye-a." Ignace's slow smile dawned on his placid features. "Now no say so. Now say have you no so strong I can the sleep a little."

" 'I can the sleep,' " mimicked Bob. "Where do you think you are; in a canning factory? What good does it do to try to teach you English? What you need to do is to can some of those 'the's' you are so fond of sticking into your conversation. Say, 'I can sleep,' not 'I can the sleep.' "

" 'I can sleep,' " dutifully repeated Iggy, "but no—but *not* now," he finished, triumphantly correcting himself.

"Got it right. Go to the head of the class," lauded Bob. "There is hope." He raised an

encouraging forefinger in droll imitation of a certain well-known advertisement.

"Where Jimmy?" Roused from his nap, Ignace became promptly aware of his favorite Brother's absence. Hence his anxious inquiry for his bunkie.

"Oh, he's looking after his flock," was the reply. "Here he comes now. Look at his face. Something's gone wrong. What's the latest news from the front, Blazes?" saluted Bob, as Jimmy dropped into the seat beside Roger, looking extremely worried.

"What do you think?" burst forth the boyish sergeant in an undertone. "I've counted the men under my charge, and two of 'em are *missing*. I had one hundred and *twenty* when we started. Now I've only a hundred and *eighteen*. I'm afraid they've skipped. Don't see how they could, though. I hate to make a fuss until I'm sure. Can't go after 'em this time," he added with a sickly smile. "Wouldn't know where to go. I've counted the bunch twice, too."

"Beat it back and count 'em again," advised Bob coolly. "You've probably miscounted twice."

"Guess I'd better." Jimmy rose and strode down the aisle, counting as he went. A few minutes later he came back looking rather bewildered.

"A hundred and *twenty-two,* this time," he made amazing announcement. "First I had

two missing; now I've got two over. What's the matter with me, anyhow?"

"Little Boy Blazes had lost his sheep
And didn't know what to do:
A hundred and twenty and two of 'em skipped
Makes a hundred and twenty-two!"

recited Bob gleefully. "Some arithmetic. Go to it again, old top. Take the two men that skipped from the hundred and twenty-two that stuck and the answer will come out right. Oh, joy!"

Disdaining to retort to this fling, Jimmy turned his back on his bunkies and proceeded to "go to it." The next time he appeared, it was with the relieved information that the hundred and twenty were all present.

"Where are the extra two?" Bob inquired tantalizingly.

"Where you'll be if you don't shut up," threatened the grinning sergeant. "Nowhere at all."

As the train neared the four Khaki Boys' home city, their minds became more strongly centered on whether or not they were to see the Blaises. There would be a stop of only twenty minutes in the yards of "the big town." They would not be allowed to go more than a few feet from the train. They could only trust that their dear ones would be permitted to pass through

the iron gates and down the long wooden platform to them.

Their heads out the window, the sight of a little group of persons on the platform sent four radiant-faced soldier boys racing out of the car and down the iron steps. Beside the Blaises was drawn up a faithful delegation of Pulinskis, the latter divided between tears and smiles.

It was a joyful and yet a sad reunion for all concerned. Ignace's family chattered and wept over him in unrestrained fashion. Mr. and Mrs. Blaise were made of sterner stuff. Though their eyes rested continually upon Jimmy, they exhibited the kindliest interest in Bob and Roger. That they had not forgotten the welfare of their boys was testified by the big hamper of home-cooked delicacies which they had brought with them. True patriots that they were, they showed brave and smiling faces to the last moment.

Only Jimmy himself caught the half-sob stifled against his breast, as he held his mother in a fond farewell embrace. Save for that one subdued sigh of grief, Mrs. Blaise surrendered her boy unfalteringly to the cause that claimed him.

The train again under way, the four Brothers had very little to say to one another for a while. Ignace's eyelids were frankly red. He had not been able to refrain from shedding a few tears,

due to the too-clamorous grief of his mother. Bob and Roger looked like a pair of very solemn young owls, while Jimmy's fine face wore an expression of deep sadness quite foreign to it. He could still hear that little, stifled sob.

Over the hamper of good things, off which they made their supper, the clouds began to lift, although no one of the four felt in a particularly lightsome mood.

It was long after dark when they began to glimpse the lights of Washington. Arrived at the capital city, they were to change to a special train, which would convey them south to their journey's end. An hour's delay, and they were speeding on their way again.

Midnight looked down upon car after car of tired soldier boys, sleeping peacefully, in spite of the discomfort of having to take their rest in the train seats. So the night passed uneventfully, and morning found them well south of Camp Sterling, but not yet half way to their destination.

Shortly before noon that day, the train stopped at a good-sized town along the route, and here the travelers were treated to a pleasant surprise. A delegation of Red Cross workers had come down to the station to meet the train, laden with sandwiches, cakes and fruit. Not only did the Sammies revel in this treat, but enjoyed fully as much the opportunity of a little pleasant conversation with the kindly women

who had thus remembered them. With mothers and sisters far away, the average home boy who enlists in the Army sadly misses his womenkind. He is apt to reflect very soberly that he never half appreciated his "women folks" until after they were too far away to tell them so save by letter.

Another night came and went. Toward morning the wind changed, blowing warmly from the south. Dawn broke, with an uncertain, cloudy sky that gave promise of rain before noon—a prospect which the Khaki Boys did not specially relish. They had heard that the locality for which they were bound was famed for its mud. A march in the rain, over roads made worse by that rain, meant not only uncomfortable going, but long hours of toil to be spent afterward in putting their uniforms and equipment in good condition again.

Near noon and shortly before their arrival at the station nearest to Camp Marvin the dreaded rain descended in silvery sheets. By the time they had reached their destination and begun to detrain the first fury of the downpour had abated considerably. Nevertheless the rain was still coming down in a steady, methodical fashion that bade fair to continue indefinitely. After a day and a half of fine, sunny weather, it was indeed aggravating that Nature had chosen to balk their hopes for a dry hike into camp. It was some consolation to them to learn

that Camp Marvin was not so far from the station as they had imagined.

At the station they were met by two sergeants from the camp and after roll call the detachment started on a march through the rain, the after recollection of which would be ever firmly linked with the word "mud."

It was a disgusted, bedraggled detachment that finally made port in the three barracks reserved for them. Informed that sufficient time to clean up would be allowed them before call to mess, they were only too glad of the chance to make themselves presentable again so far as they could within the time allotted to them. A real clean-up would occupy the most of their spare moments for a day to come.

"I love the Army, but oh you mud!" exclaimed Bob, who had had the good fortune to be assigned to the cot next to Roger. Jimmy and Ignace had landed in the same barrack, but were separated from each other as well as their Brothers by many cots.

"It beats anything I ever saw for stickiness," returned Roger, as he labored diligently to part it from his shoes. "I'd hate to be on police detail in this camp after a hard rain."

"We may be yet, before we're through," shrugged Bob. "It's hard to tell how long we'll be here. We may have to hang around here for a month or more."

"I doubt it. I'd say a week, perhaps, but

hardly longer than that. Something seems to tell me that we are only transients at Camp Marvin."

"Voices in the air?" quizzed Bob humorously.

"Hardly that." Roger smiled. Bob had quoted a phrase, uttered by a certain high official, that was being wafted from lip to lip all over the United States. "I haven't any particular reason for saying it. I just think so. Perhaps it's what the K. O. said to Jimmy. He might have meant it only in a general way. Then again he might not."

"If we stay here long enough and the mud dries up I'm going to try to get a squint at this part of the country. I've heard a lot about the buzzards and the real Southern darkies and all 'them there' sights. I want to see 'em for myself." Soldier though he had become, Bob was first of all and would ever be the born reporter. The desire to observe was ingrained.

"Glad we took old Blazes' advice and put our extra leggins in our haversack. He'd had one run-in with southern mud and he got wise." His shoes fairly well cleaned, Bob had next extracted a pair of brand new leggins from his haversack and begun to lace them on.

"Here's Jimmy now. You don't look so worse," he greeted as his bunkie joined them. "Didn't take you long to tidy up."

"I don't feel tidy," frowned Jimmy. "I feel

as though I was made of mud. I'm going to hunt up a shower bath the first chance I get."

"We're due to pay the barracks sink a call. Look at my hands." Bob held them up for inspection. "Then I guess with a face wash and a hair slicking we'll do at a pinch. Great lovely dove, but I'm hungry, though! Where's old Iggins?"

"I left him at the sink. Get a move on and follow him, you two. After mess I'm going to sidle up to the top sergeant here and see if I can't fix it for us to bunk alongside of one another."

"Wish you would." Bob's face brightened.

"So do I," emphasized Roger.

"United we flourish, divided we crumple," declaimed Jimmy. "I'll overlook the mere matter of a little mud, but hang it all, I want to bunk with the bunch. We started out that way and we're going to stay that way as long as there's any way to keep it that way!"

CHAPTER IV

OUT TO SEE THE SIGHTS

"SPEAKING confidentially, man to man, etc., this camp isn't in it for a minute with Sterling," was Bob Dalton's frank opinion, delivered for the private benefit of his bunkies as they fraternized briefly before Taps.

"It's a much larger camp, but not so well laid out," observed Roger. "I mean it seems more scattered. Sterling was almost like a regular military town. After one got used to it one could find one's way to any spot in it. It would take me a long time to do that here."

"So think I," agreed Ignace soulfully, already having had his own troubles in that respect. "Last the night look for canteen; him ver' hard fin'. Come I back, no fin' barrack. Many times have I to ask where is him before get right."

"Yes, and who was the last person you

asked?" laughed Jimmy. "It's too good to keep, Iggy. I've got to spill it."

"You tell, I no care." Ignace spread out his hands in a magnificent gesture of permission.

Three days had elapsed since the four Brothers had made muddy port in Camp Marvin. During that time they had been put through the most strenuous drill that had thus far fallen to their lot since their enlistment. It had begun with a long hike under full pack the morning after their arrival. Though the rain had ceased, the mud still remained and was likely to remain indefinitely. According to the statements of men who had been in Camp Marvin longest, it never dried up. "You just have to get used to it," was the cheerful consolation one soldier had dealt out to Jimmy Blaise.

Returning at noon, weary and mud-stained, had come a second siege of cleaning up in a hurry for mess, followed by an afternoon of trench practice equally hard on uniforms and equipment.

The Khaki Boys soon grew to regard "cleaning up" as the most important event of the day. Certainly it ate up their spare time, leaving them little or no recreation period except in the evening after mess. It even obtruded itself on that. By the time they had put everything in trim for the next day, it was too late and they were too tired to do other than turn in.

"Let's hear what Iggy did," requested Bob. "Spill."

"Well," began Jimmy with a merry glance at the Pole, "you fellows remember I went over to the canteen last night to get a newspaper. Iggy had started for there before I left barracks. On the way back I was tearing along with my head bent, for the wind was blowing like sixty. All of a sudden I heard somebody ask me in a nice polite way how to get to the canteen. Maybe I didn't laugh, though. It was Iggins, here. He didn't know his Buddy when he saw him. What do you think of that?"

"Better get a rainmaker to give your lamps the once over, Iggy," advised Bob amusedly. "Maybe they're on the blink. If you don't know your own Buddy when you meet him how do you expect you're ever going to pick a Boche from a Sammy?"

"Now you mak' the fun to me," giggled Ignace. "Anyhow am I no the queer bird what see ver' well by the dark. So is it think I Jimmy som' othar solder."

"I'll forgive you this time, but don't let it happen again," teased Jimmy.

"Never more," vowed Ignace so earnestly as to evoke fresh mirth at his expense.

"What I'd like to know," began Bob irrelevantly, "is when do we get some time off? Wonder if we would get a pass to go sightseeing? I don't mean into the city." Bob re-

ferred to the metropolis of the state, situated not many miles from Camp Marvin. "I'd like to hit it up for some of these little towns and see the aborigines."

"What is?" inquired Ignace curiously.

"What's what?" counter-questioned Bob, then laughed. "Oh, a bunch of folks that grew up in the mud down here. Some of 'em eat it and get fat on it," he informed his mystified bunkie.

"Faugh!" Ignace made a wry face. "No even the crazy mud eat. You can no mak' me believe."

Ignace had never heard of that class of persons known in the South as "clay eaters." His blue eyes grew large with incredulity as Bob explained the term to him. "I no want the pass see sooch ab—— what you call," was his disgusted ultimatum.

"You can look at something else then," consoled Jimmy. "Don't worry, Iggy. You're not likely to run into a family party eating mud pies in public. It simply isn't done in the best families. If you get a pass, grab it, and don't be a quitter."

"To-morrow's Saturday, let's go together to headquarters and ask for a leave of absence for the afternoon and evening," proposed Roger. "We can't more than get turned down."

"If we get the cold 'Nix' we'll know we're

due to move on. If we get the passes, we'll know that we're due to stop here for a while longer anyway," was Bob's shrewd conclusion.

Application for leave of absence next day was crowned with success. Their request for passes was granted without a murmur. As a rule none of them ever had much difficulty in obtaining what they wanted in the way of privileges. As non-coms, Bob, Jimmy and Roger stood high in the estimation of their ranking officers. Ignace, though still a private, rather basked in the light of their reflected glory.

A gloriously sunshiny Saturday afternoon saw the quartette striding down their company street together on pleasure bent. They had agreed to hike along until they reached the river, a wide stream that bounded the eastern limits of Camp Marvin. Along its opposite side ran a passable highway, for that part of the country. To reach it they were obliged to continue along the camp side of the stream for almost a mile, where a bridge over the river afforded a crossing of it.

This bridge was a most important asset to Camp Marvin, being the only one, except a railroad bridge, within several miles of the camp. Via this bridge large consignments of supplies were delivered into camp from a freight depot on the opposite side. In consequence it was well guarded to prevent any possible attempt to destroy it. For it to be put

out of commission would mean vexatious delay and great additional expense in the transportation of supplies into camp.

The highway across the river for which the Khaki Boys were bound ran parallel to the stream, separated from it only by the tamarack and balsam trees which fringed the river bank. Two days of wind and sunshine had done considerable toward drying up the mud on the camp side. The hikers, however, were dubious of finding the highway across the river in even as good condition.

This did not trouble them much. They had now begun to "get used to mud" and accepted it as an unpleasant matter of course. Once they had gained this river road, they purposed to follow it "to see what we can see" until they reached a town about three miles below the bridge, where they had been told they could obtain a "bang-up chicken supper" at a certain restaurant called "The Dixie."

"I'd hate to take a swim in that rusty old tank," observed Jimmy with a disapproving wag of his head toward the river, the color of which was a dingy brown.

They had now left the bridge behind them and struck the highway.

"I'll bet it's a regular mud-hole underneath."

"There's where you've got another guess coming," contradicted Roger. "It's not mud

that makes the river that dirty brown color. Go down to the bank and stick your hand in the water. You'll find it's clear enough. It's the roots of the tamaracks along its banks that give it that color."

"Who told you so much about it?" challenged Jimmy.

"Oh, I was talking to a fellow in camp who's lived down here nearly all his life and knows the country. He told me a lot of interesting things. He says we'll have our troubles understanding the darkies. Says he can't always make out himself what they say."

"Here comes one now." Bob pointed up the road. Shuffling toward them at a snail pace was a curious figure, which greatly resembled an animated rag-bag. A shiny black face, topped by a white woolly crown, gave proof, however, that the flapping rags clothed a human being.

"Pipe the costume," muttered Bob, as the ancient African drew nearer. "I can't let this go by unchallenged."

Raising his voice he hailed: "Hello, Sambo! How's everything?"

Stopping in his tracks, the old man's black features seemed to vanish in a grin which outrivaled that of the famous Cheshire cat. It stretched upward toward his ears, displaying apparently endless white teeth. As it slowly disappeared and his face reappeared he burst

forth in a flow of genial reply which certainly no one save himself understood.

As the ancient paused for breath Bob replied heartily: "Glad to hear it! Glad to hear it!" His black eyes dancing, he proceeded mischievously to draw the darky out, meeting the unintelligible volume of pleasantries hurled at him with sage nods of the head and enthusiastic: "Ain't it the truth?" "Now you're talking!" and various other encouraging baits.

Content to let Bob conduct the interview, his bunkies' will to laugh threatened sudden explosion with every added word the old man uttered.

"*Taisez-vous; avancez,* you four-flusher!" commanded Jimmy in a choking voice, which, translated into English, means, "Shut up; move on!" Obeying his own order, he waggishly saluted the affable rag-bag and strode on, accompanied by Roger and Ignace, the latter chuckling audibly. Finding himself deserted, Bob hastily wound up the social session and hustled, grinning, after his Brothers.

"Don't you dare hold up the next scarecrow native we meet. Try it again and we'll shake you for the rest of the afternoon," warned Jimmy, as Bob caught up with the trio.

"I should say so," agreed Roger with mock severity. "You old bluff! You never understood a word of that gibberish. I wanted to

howl, but I hated to hurt that old-timer's feelings."

"We had a lovely talk," chuckled Bob. "I'd tell you what he said, but I promised to keep it a secret."

"Te-he!" snickered Ignace. "You never tell, 'cause you no understan'!"

"How'd you guess it? You know too much, Iggy. I'll have to watch out for you. You're a dangerous man."

"You're a dangerous fake," laughed Roger. "You're too good to be true."

"That's right; knock. Here I go and exert myself to give you fellows a little treat, and what do you do? Call me names and try to blacken my character."

In this bantering strain the quartette of sight-seers continued their travels along the rough road, finding nothing more exciting than occasionally encountering other darkies quite as ragged as the one with whom Bob had stopped to talk. With the exception of one jogging along in a rude two-wheeled cart drawn by a mule, the rest were padding it on foot, at the lazy, slothful gait of the true southern negro. Satisfied with his one attempt at sociability, Bob made no effort to pry further into the mysteries of their dialect.

"That looks like the hoopskirts of our little town." Bob pointed ahead to a scattered col-

lection of frame dwellings. "Welcome to our city!"

A sudden whoop from Jimmy directed all eyes toward him. "Look!" he shouted gleefully. "If that isn't some sight! Rastus Henry and Lindy Lou out for a ride and stuck in the mud! Come on, fellows! Let's help 'em out. This is going to be some adventure!"

CHAPTER V

THE CRY IN THE NIGHT

WITH another wild whoop, Jimmy left the road and set off across a muddy open space to its right that sloped gently down to the river itself. Absence of trees proclaimed it to be a fording place in the stream. At the foot of the slope a few feet from the river, one of the rickety two-wheeled carts, common to that locality, stood imbedded in the soft yellow mud.

To make matters worse, the mule harnessed to it had evidently gone on a strike. Unmindful of the frantic yells of his driver and the showers of blows the latter was raining upon him with a dilapidated whip stock, he remained stubbornly immovable, refusing to budge.

"Hey, there, you! Don't kill that mule!" shouted Jimmy angrily.

Swashing through the mud he brought up beside the cart, his bunkies close behind him.

"How do you suppose he can pull that cart

when it's stuck in the mud? Get out and do something and we'll give you a hand."

Rising from the seat of his makeshift chariot, the driver, a wizened-faced little darky, surveyed the soldier rescue party with wildly rolling eyes. With one accord the four boys were off into fits of laughter. Not only the little man's comical expression of dismay provoked mirth. None of them had ever before seen quite such a funny array of garments as he had collected on his person.

His brilliant red and green plaid top coat of 1915 vintage was thrown wide, displaying a red and yellow figured vest and a pair of very grimy white flannel trousers. A royal purple four-in-hand tie fluttered buoyantly in the breeze, giving glimpses of a bright pink shirt. His distracted black face rose from a gaily-striped but very dirty collar.

As a last touch of elegance his kinky wool was topped with a discouraged-looking Panama hat, several sizes too small, but redeemed by a rainbow-hued ribbon band. His trousers turned up at least a foot from the hem; they nevertheless were so long as to obscure the full glory of a pair of white canvas shoes that were sadly in need of attention.

His companion of the outing, a very stout, black young woman who occupied the greater part of the rude seat, was a living representation of the seven primary colors. She was

loaded down with finery, all of which had seen better days. The dejected, curlless, pale-green willow plume on her red felt hat fairly screamed of the junk heap, while a partially featherless black and white ostrich boa streamed its ends over one shoulder like an unruly snake.

"Have a heart, Blazes." Weak with laughter Bob leaned against the cart. "Rastus isn't strong for spoiling that get up. Can you blame him? Oh, boy!"

"Hang his get up!" sputtered Jimmy. "Are you going to move?" he demanded, sharply addressing the unwilling Rastus. "Better be quick about it. We're not standing here in the mud for our health."

"Yas, sah, yas, sah, I'se a-movin'!" The darky handed the whip to his lady and swung a reluctant white-clad leg over one side of the cart.

"Glad to hear it," snapped Jimmy. "Come on, now! Lindy Lou can stay where she is."

"Ah ahn't no Lindy Lou!" retorted the lady disdainfully. She had already set the four Brothers down as "po' white trash." No real "massa" would demean himself by offering to help a couple of "niggahs."

"Beg your pardon," Jimmy bowed ironically, then turned his attention to Rastus, who had now descended and was standing on one foot like a crane, determined to save at least one shoe from the mud.

"Go ahead and lead your fiery steed, Rastus," directed Jimmy. "Everybody else take hold and—heave-ho! Both feet, now, Rastus Henry. No slacking. Get in the game and do your bit, or away we go and leave you stuck!"

Thus threatened, Rastus resigned himself to the inevitable and picked his way daintily to the mule's head, urged continually by the relentless Jimmy to "lift up your feet and show some pep!"

Finally arrived at the beast's head he addressed it in a flow of uncomplimentary jargon, accompanying every word with a vicious jerking of the mule's head that brought fresh instruction from Jimmy "to leave his head on, you idiot!"

Thus violently persuaded, the mule decided to go. Aided by the combined strength of the four Brothers the cart won free of the mud with a lurch that all but sent plump Lindy Lou sailing over the front of the vehicle and into the mire. Recovering her balance she launched into a volley of irate protest that merely provoked the good Samaritans to wilder mirth.

"Come on, let's beat it," gasped Bob.

Still laughing immoderately the quartette stood watching the gorgeous-plumed Rastus, now back in the cart, drive into the river, calling profuse thanks over his shoulder as he went. Lindy Lou, however, ungratefully refused to favor the rescuers with so much as a glance.

She had her own opinion of "them low-down, no 'count Yankee soldiers" who had laughed at her.

"Lindy Lou has our number all right," chuckled Roger. "It's naughty naught. We disgraced ourselves by hauling two darkies out of the mud."

"We certainly don't belong to the 'first families,' " grinned Jimmy.

"So should us worry," declared Ignace. "Never have I see sooch fonny dress."

"They looked like a couple of rag-time minstrels," commented Roger. "I've heard a lot about the ridiculous way the darkies tog down South. I'd never have believed it, though, if I hadn't seen this pair."

"We took on a fresh load of mud helping 'em." Bob ruefully surveyed his mire-weighted tan shoes and bespattered leggins. "Let's get back to the road and scrape some of this stuff off our shoes. I guess by the time we get back to camp they'd have looked about as bad, anyway."

Regaining the road the hikers cleaned their shoes as best they could, then started on again. It was not long before they arrived in the town itself and were presently tramping along its main street in search of the "Dixie," the particular restaurant where they might obtain the coveted chicken dinner. Though it was far from supper time, their hike in the sharp air

had put a keen edge on their appetites.

"Here's our hash house!" sang out Bob. They had traversed several blocks of the business section of the town before finding the restaurant for which they were looking.

"This is some burg; all dinky little general stores and blacksmith shops. I've seen one rocky old hotel so far, two drug stores and a one-horse movie palace. Suppose we make a stab at that chicken dinner and then take in the movies. There doesn't seem to be much else doing around here."

"Glad we didn't draw Marvin for ours when we started soldiering," congratulated Jimmy. "It's farther away from a big city than Sterling is. Little Glenwood's a busy mart beside this dead hole. The only real hustlers around here are the buzzards. Look at 'em, will you."

He pointed to a delegation of the big, ungainly birds gathered in the street a little above the restaurant.

"Wouldn't a drill sarge love 'em, though?" smiled Roger, as the quartette paused to watch their lurching, hopping progress along the street. "They'd make the finest awkward squad ever."

"They look like a lot of untidy turkeys who've canned their self-respect," was Bob's whimsical metaphor. "They'd shine on policing barracks, though, wouldn't they?"

"Better suggest it to the K. O. at Marvin," proposed Roger mischievously.

"Let Rodge do it," retorted Bob. "I want to live a little while longer."

Leaving the flapping scavengers of the South to their everlasting street policing, the Khaki Boys entered the Dixie, which proved more attractive within than without.

Choosing a table near the door they gave their order for fried chicken and hot biscuits to a grinning darky, who came back four times to make sure of it before finally disappearing into the kitchen at the rear.

Then followed almost an hour of impatient waiting, eventually crowned with the appearance of a huge platter of golden brown chicken and its accompaniments that made their mouths water.

"Some feed," sighed Bob in utter satisfaction when at last nothing remained of the feast but empty plates.

"It was worth getting a pass for," agreed Roger. "We won't get another like it in a long while."

"It's after five." Jimmy consulted his wrist watch. "I don't want to put a crimp in this joy-fest but I believe we'd better pass up the movie and hit it up for camp. I don't cotton to hiking back over that rocky old road after dark."

"Probably the show would be on the bum,

anyway," speculated Bob. "Guess we've done the town. We might as well kiss it good-bye."

"So think I," declared Ignace. "I have the much eat. I am the sleepy. Rather I see my cot than go by the so silly movie."

"I guess we're all ready to take a squint at our cots," smiled Roger. "If we start now we won't make camp before dark."

"Attention! Forward march!" Bob rose, gathering up the supper checks with a dexterous swoop. "This is my treat," he informed. "Don't say a word or I'll be peevish."

"Squander your dough then," laughed Jimmy. "You don't have to work for it as we do. We'll get even with you at the next jubilee, won't we, fellows?"

Roger and Ignace promptly vowing that they would, Bob was allowed to have his way. Each was always ready to do a little more than his share when on an outing. It was therefore only a matter of who got there first when it came to paying up.

A few minutes brisk hiking and they were clear of the town and on the homeward stretch to camp. The sun had already set and twilight was closing down upon the landscape. They could still see well enough, however, to avoid the bad spots in the road. By the time it was dark a brisk "quick-time" gait had brought them within a short distance of the bridge.

"Better get your passes ready," said Roger

as they neared it. "We'll be challenged by the guard."

Coming four abreast to the entrance to the bridge, however, no guard was to be seen.

"Where the dickens is he?" exclaimed Jimmy.

"Patroling the river bank down there, maybe, if there isn't another guard besides him on detail here. I should think there ought to be two on each side of the river. There would be if this was at Sterling."

As if in answer to Jimmy's question a sudden half-muffled cry that sounded like "Help!" floated up from the darkness below.

Acting with his usual impulsive haste, Jimmy left the bridge in a silent, reckless dash down the slope that ended in a brief level at the edge of the river itself. He knew, if his bunkies did not, that the cry had come from under the bridge, and he forged directly toward this point, whipping out his flashlight as he ran.

Its white rays disclosed two men engaged in desperate conflict, one of whom was a soldier. The instant the light revealed them, one loosed his hold on the other, dealt him a swift, vicious blow and ran for the bank on the opposite side of the bridge.

Determined to catch him, Jimmy bounded after the fleeing man. He knew it was not the soldier who had run, but some unknown civilian bent on committing some sort of depredation.

His flashlight still in play he could see the fugitive making for the slope and could hear the slap of his feet on the muddy ground.

Half way up the bank the runner stumbled and shot forward on his hands and knees. His fall giving Jimmy a second's advantage, he cleared the intervening feet that lay between them. Before he could close in on the fugitive, the latter had regained his feet.

Whirling, he aimed a savage blow at Jimmy. It grazed the tip of one shoulder, sending him spinning backward down the slope but with not enough force to lift him entirely off his feet. Had it landed squarely on his chest he would probably have found the level below with a broken neck. As it was, his backward descent ended in a wild staggering about that almost precipitated him into the river.

Meanwhile, though Bob, Roger and Iggy had rushed promptly after him, they had momentarily lost him in the darkness. By the time they had reached the spot where the struggle had taken place Jimmy had gone on in pursuit of the fugitive.

Bringing his own flashlight into use, the first thing Bob saw was a figure in an olive-drab uniform stretched flat in the mud.

"It's Blazes!" howled Bob. "No it isn't, either! It's the guard! But where's old Jimmy?"

"Gone after the fellow that did this!" ex-

claimed Roger loudly. "He's gone that way! Stay with this poor man, Iggy, while Bob and I go after Jimmy. Who knows what's happened to him by this time!"

CHAPTER VI

UNDER THE BRIDGE

RUNNING on under the bridge in an opposite direction from which they had come, Bob and Roger collided full tilt in the darkness with the lost Jimmy, as he staggered about on the river bank attempting to regain his balance. As a result of this violent contact he promptly sat down in the mud. The very thing he had been trying not to do!

"What——" His flashlight trained on the fallen one, Bob became bereft of speech.

"Yes, *what!*" mimicked Jimmy savagely as he scrambled to his feet. "Now you *have* done it!"

"Done what? Where did you come from? Did the fellow get away?"

Roger's voice grew a little louder with each question.

"He's gone, all right. I almost had him, though. Chased him up the bank. He fell on his hands and knees. Just as I was going to

nab him, he got up, whirled like a flash and hit me a clip. Then he beat it. He aimed an awful one at me. It was so dark he missed all but the very tip of my right shoulder. It just grazed me.

"I dropped my flashlight when I tried to grab him. That tap sent me sailing backward down the bank. Don't know how I managed to keep my feet. I kept on going on 'em though, but I nearly landed in the river. It got my hat, though. I was still see-sawing around when you dubs upset me in the mud. Thanks to you, I'll bet the back of my overcoat's a nice sight. After all the trouble I took to keep on standing up, too!"

"Hang the back of your overcoat!" exploded Bob. "Here we rush after you, thinking you may have got yours. Then you give us Hail Columbia for accidentally toppling you over. Gee, but you're grateful! Forget your old Sammy togs. What did the fellow look like? Did you see his face?"

"Just for a second when I caught him choking the sentry. My light picked 'em up. Right then he let go, binged the sentry one and beat it. I'd know him, though, if I ever saw him again. He was a husky brute. Had a big head and a shock of black hair. If he ever had a hat he'd lost it. Maybe it's kicking around under the bridge. What about the sentry?"

Jimmy's voice conveyed alarm.

"Iggy's back there with him. He'd been put to sleep all right enough when we found him. Come on. Let's go to him."

Guided by Bob's light the trio returned to find Iggy in the act of helping the injured man to his feet. He was blinking dazedly, unable to recall for the moment what had happened to him. Though it seemed hours since the four had rushed to his aid, the whole affair had not occupied more than ten or fifteen minutes.

"How do you feel?" Roger passed a supporting arm behind the soldier who was swaying dizzily.

"All—right—now." The reply came in a hoarse whisper. "He—nearly shut—off—my wind. He must—have—handed—me—one here. I—I can't quite remember. My—face—aches." He passed an unsteady hand across his right cheek.

"He handed you a hard one," assured Jimmy grimly. "I saw him do it. Then he beat it. Are you alone on duty here?"

"No. There—are—two—of us. I called out —to—the man—who's with—me. He—didn't hear—I guess."

"Humph!" Jimmy made up his mind to do some prompt investigating. When first approaching the bridge they had seen no sign of a guard.

"I have my han'chief in the river put," broke

in Ignace anxiously. "So wash I the face this poor man. So is he the better now."

"Good for you, Iggy!" cheered Bob. "That's the first aid stuff! Feeling better now?" he asked the guard.

"I'm all right," reiterated the guard in a slightly steadier tone. "You fellows saved my life, I guess."

"We heard you yell. We belong in camp, you know. We were out on passes and just coming back," explained Roger. "You'd better go up on the bridge now while we look for the other man. Then two of us will stay here with you while the other two go up to camp, and report this affair. Where's your rifle?"

"He—the—fellow snatched it. He must have thrown it aside. He wasn't out to make a noise or he'd have shot me. I was walking under the bridge when he leaped onto me like a tiger. I yelled just once before he got me by the throat. Don't know what his game was. Blow up the bridge, maybe."

"Looks like it," quickly agreed Bob.

"Lend me your light, Bob, while I look for the rifle." Roger released his arm from around the guard's shoulders and started on a hunt for the missing firearm. He presently found it, lying on the ground only a few feet back of where the group stood.

Walking between Iggy and Bob, the guard was escorted slowly up the slope to the bridge

floor. Jimmy and Roger hurried on ahead of them to search for the missing guard.

Ten minutes later by the aid of the flashlight they found him, bound and gagged, lying face down in a thicket of bushes just off the road and only a few yards from the bridge. Free of the thin tough rope which had rendered him helpless, the oakum gag taken from his mouth, he sprang to his feet, spat vigorously and launched into a violent tirade of abuse against his unknown assailant.

"I was walkin' my post," he sputtered, "when all of a sudden a man pops outta them there bushes an' hits me a wallop that puts me to sleep. When I come to, I was layin' in them same bushes, trussed up for fair. That's all I know about it, but oh, crackey! If I had my hands on him now I'd wipe up the sunny South with him!"

Roger solicitously inquiring if he was hurt, he exploded into a fresh torrent of vituperation.

"Hurt? Naw, I ain't hurt. Just mad, clean to the bone. It's my pride hurts me. On guard an' get it put over me like that! Sure I'm goin' to finish my detail. I wouldn't let a little thing like that scare me. I want my rifle, though. Any of you seen it?"

A fresh hunt revealed no trace of the second guard's rifle. Bob guessed that it might have been hurled into the river. That it was not

found the next day seemed to indicate that the river had received this unexpected donation into its brown depths.

Jimmy and Roger remaining temporarily to look after the injured guard, it fell to Ignace and Bob to carry the report back to Camp Marvin. Reporting directly to headquarters, the story told by them created a considerable flurry of excitement there. The commanding officer, a dark, keen-eyed man in the prime of life, put both young men through a searching inquisition regarding the affair.

He briefly commended Bob and Ignace for the prompt, fearless manner in which they and their two bunkies had acted. Neither did he appear to consider the two sentries to blame for the misfortune which had overtaken them.

Detaining them until the arrival of the corporal of the guard for whom he had sent, he apprised the latter of the assault, ordering him to take a detail of men and proceed at once to the bridge, with the instructions to have the river bank patrolled up and down for a certain distance on both sides of the stream. Roger, Jimmy and the men who had been attacked were to be relieved at once, with the order to report directly to headquarters. A double guard was to be posted at the bridge for the remainder of the night.

Later, relieved of their self-imposed duty, Jimmy and Roger had the pleasure of a per-

sonal interview with Major Warren, at which only those three persons were present. Bob and Ignace had already been commended, dismissed and had returned to barracks.

"Which one of you is Sergeant Blaise?" was the K. O.'s first question as the two came to attention before him.

"I am Blaise, sir."

"Let me hear your account of this affair," was the command.

"We were coming back to camp, sir. Just as we struck the bridge on the other side of the river we heard some one yell 'Help!' It sounded from under the bridge. We all ran down there. I was ahead. I pulled out my flash-light and saw two men having a fight. One of them was the sentry. The other was a big man with heavy black hair.

"The minute I flashed my light he let go the sentry's throat, struck him down with his fist and ran. I ran after him. He started up the bank and fell. I tried to grab him but he whirled and hit me. I went down the bank backwards. Then he made his get-away.

"By the time I'd pulled myself together it was too late to go after him. I'd lost my light and I knew I couldn't pick up his trail again in the dark. I'm sorry I lost him."

Jimmy looked rueful.

"So am I," grimly assured the K. O.

The ghost of a smile touched his firm mouth.

Hatless and mud-spattered though he was, Jimmy presented a gallant figure of intrepid youth that warmed the major's heart.

"You did your best, Blaise," he continued. "I have no fault to find with you on that score."

"Thank you, sir. I forgot to say that I should know the man that attacked the sentry if ever I were to see him again. He was a foreigner, I am almost sure of that."

Interested to learn this, the major questioned Jimmy closely regarding the miscreant's probable height, weight and general appearance. So far as the young sergeant had been able to judge in the brief glimpses he had caught of the marauder he declared him to be of medium height, but stockily built and of great muscular strength. Jimmy was also of the opinion that he might be Austrian rather than German.

Finished with Jimmy, Roger was next asked for his version of the incident. Greatly to his bunkie's disgust he laid considerable stress on the highly fearless manner in which Jimmy had conducted himself. Meeting the quizzical scrutiny of the K. O.'s black eyes during the recital, Jimmy colored hotly and barely refrained from disgracing himself by ducking his head and saying: "Oh, I'm not so much!"

It was almost time for Taps before the two Khaki Boys left headquarters for barracks.

"What the dickens made you go and tell the K. O. all that stuff about me?" Jimmy de-

manded in vexation the moment they were out of headquarters. "I felt foolish all over listening to you trying to make me out as something great. If you'd been ahead when we sailed down the bank you'd have done the same."

"Maybe I would, but that's not the point," smiled Roger. "The point is that you *did* get ahead of the rest of us. You're generally a lap ahead of us, Blazes. I guess you always will be. You needn't be peeved at what I told the K. O. He had your number before I said a word. I could see that. I'll bet he'll make it his business to find out all about you, too. You can't behave like a live wire four thirds of the time and then expect no one will find it out. You can't be a blazing Blazes without someone seeing you blaze."

CHAPTER VII

A CALL ON THE K. O.

RETURNED from breakfast the next morning, the four Brothers promptly attacked the tiresome task of "cleaning up," which promised this time to be "some job." Four pairs of mud-caked shoes and mud-spattered leggins cried out for attention, to say nothing of sundry splashes of "sloppy southern soil," as Bob sarcastically put it, which decorated the skirts of their overcoats.

From collar to hem, Jimmy's overcoat bore generous testimonials of this self-same "soil." All four had been obliged to don sweaters to go to breakfast as the condition of their top-coats forbade the wearin of them until time and labor had made them again presentable. Each having an extra pair of shoes and leggins, they had managed to pass muster at roll-call.

The loss of Jimmy's hat had not troubled him much. Only the day before he had purchased a new one intending to initiate it into

service when they should leave camp to "go over." Now he was only too glad to make ready use of it.

"I'm going to hand this confounded overcoat to a tailor," he informed Roger grumpily. Having brushed the muddy garment until his arms ached he hung it back on his side of the rack, glaring at it in deep disgust. "I'm going to pitch these leggins into the rubbish can, too. They're done for. I'll buy a new pair to-morrow. I'm not going to——"

"What happened to you fellows yesterday?" broke in a voice at Jimmy's elbow. "Did you get wrecked in a mud-puddle?"

"Oh, hello, Schnitz!" Turning quickly, Jimmy greeted the German-American with a genial grin. "Glad you came across. We were going to call you over here as soon as we got through tidying up. You missed it by not going with us yesterday. We had one queer time. Maybe you've heard about it already?" he added interrogatively.

"No." Schnitzel shook his head. "I noticed the way you fellows came in last night. First Bob and Pulinski; then you and Barlow quite a bit later. I was in bed, but not asleep. My head still ached like sixty!"

Due to violent sick headache which occasionally attacked him, Schnitzel had refused the four Brothers' invitation to go sight-seeing with them on the previous day.

"We didn't have a chance to talk to you last night," broke in Roger, looking up from the final polish he was giving his tan shoes. "We've quite a lot to tell *you*. We're not going to give it out to anyone else, though. We weren't told at headquarters to keep still, but that doesn't matter. If the story goes around camp it won't be up to us."

"Headquarters?" Schnitzel's eye-brows lifted. "I certainly must have missed something! Fire away. I'm all ears."

Dropping down on Jimmy's cot, Schnitzel waited expectantly.

Seating himself beside the German-American Jimmy narrated in a low voice the events of the previous evening.

"Whew!" Schnitzel gave a sharp whistle as the tale reached an end. "Some adventure! No wonder you're all doing the great cleaning-up act! A queer deal. The fellow must have been a regular gorilla and clever at that. A man who could do up two sentries with so little trouble is a dangerous proposition. You had your nerve to go after him, Blazes."

"I just dodged a broken neck." Jimmy grew briefly sober, then laughed. "I'm lucky, I guess."

"You're more than that." A gleam of admiration shot into Schnitzel's eyes.

"Take a squint at that overcoat." Jimmy

hastily changed the subject. "What do you think of a couple of ruffians that will knock a bunkie into the mud and think nothing of it?"

"That's right, Reckless Rollo, hand it to us." Bob now put in an oar. "Ruffians, eh? Hear that, Rodge? I suppose the heavyweight who sent you sailing down the bank was a gentleman."

"Not so you could notice it," retorted Jimmy. "A Boche gentleman, maybe."

"You say you'd know him if you saw him again?" interrogated Schnitzel.

"I'm pretty sure of it. I couldn't see his face very plainly. It's a kind of general idea I got of him that makes me think I'd know him again. I might be mistaken. I don't believe I am."

"Did you hear his voice?" pursued Schnitzel, with deep interest.

"No. He never opened his face. He was clever, all right enough. He was out to do damage. We think he meant to blow up the bridge. If he'd planted his bombs he must have been at it before the sentry got there. Then we butted in and he had to duck and run before he had time to finish his work. I guess by this time every foot of land under the bridge and near there has been gone over. Course we weren't told anything at headquarters. It isn't likely we will be, either. You know how it is

in the Army about anything like that. We may never hear another word about it."

"And again, you may," disagreed Schnitzel. "Secret service'll be put on the case, of course. If their men happen to catch any fellow or fellows hanging around camp and acting in a suspicious manner you may be called to look their catch over. It'll depend, I suppose, on whether they find any bombs or explosives around the bridge. I'll bet a camp detail has been nosing around down there since daylight. If so, they may dig up something before secret service gets on the job."

"That's about what old Bob says," replied Jimmy. "Still if they do find anything we may never know it. Unless they run in some suspicious character we'll be out of it from now on. It would do me a whole lot of good, though, just to know what that gorilla man was up to."

Jimmy's curiosity on that point was destined to be satisfied sooner than he had expected. Late that afternoon the four Brothers were summoned to headquarters and conducted into Major Warren's private office, where he sat in solitary state at his desk. Coming to attention before him his first words sent nervous thrills racing up and down their spinal columns.

"Men," he began, "I sent for you in reference to your good work last night. This morning a detail sent out from here found enough high explosives planted under the bridge across

the river to blow it to atoms. Only your prompt response to the sentry's yell for help prevented an enemy to the Government from finishing his job and the bridge, too.

"The destruction of the bridge would have meant serious delay and great additional expense in the transportation of camp supplies, to say nothing of the added labor and expense of rebuilding the bridge," he went on. "I desire, therefore, to commend you in the name of the Government of the United States and the National Army for your timely services to both."

His tone indicating the conclusion of the one-sided interview, four hands came up in prompt salute and the Khaki Boys wheeled to take brisk departure.

"Just a moment, Sergeant Blaise," commanded the major.

Instantly Jimmy swung about, returning to the desk and standing at attention.

For a brief moment the K. O. silently surveyed the boyish sergeant.

"You have made an excellent record for yourself, Blaise, since your enlistment in the Army last August," he said. "Since last night, I've heard very good reports of you; not alone from your company officers, either. I'm going to read you a telegraphic despatch in reply to one I sent last night."

His fine face impassive as he listened to the K. O., Jimmy nevertheless felt the hot color

rise to his cheeks. He had a very clear idea of the source of the telegram in Major Warren's hand.

"'Yours received,'" read the major. "'Delighted with report of services rendered Army by four Camp Sterling men, particularly Blaise. If deemed advisable express to him my personal gratification.'"

The despatch was signed by Major Stearns of Camp Sterling.

"I 'deemed it advisable' to read you this, Blaise," commented Major Warren, with a faint smile. "A man who has earned such a commendation from his recent commanding officer has a right to hear it. A soldier whose first, last and only thought is for the Service will never allow his head to be turned by a word of praise.

"Now a word regarding the man who made the attempt to blow up the bridge," he continued. "You were the only one to gain an impression of his personal appearance. Your description of him is not full enough to admit of identification by others. He's still at large, a dangerous enemy to the United States.

"He may be a fanatical sympathizer with the Central Powers, out to do damage for that reason. He may be one of their countless agents, pursuing a course of deviltry laid out for him by his masters," surmised the K. O. "There is one chance in a thousand that you will ever

again cross his path. I shall ask you, however, always to be on the lookout for him. Keep your eyes open wherever you go. There is that *one chance* that you may meet him when you least expect.

"It would be useless to advise you how to proceed under such circumstances, having no knowledge as to how, when or where, if ever, such an encounter might take place between you. Your success in apprehending a man who has shown plain evidence of unusual strength, daring and cunning, would depend entirely upon the condition of the moment. There is also the possibility that you might be mistaken in your man. It is a serious thing to accuse an innocent man of a crime, but it is even more serious to allow a guilty man to escape. Remember that. I do not recommend you to think too much about this. Still it will do you no harm to be constantly on the alert."

"I've thought about that man a good deal, sir, since I saw him last night." Jimmy spoke for the first time since the K. O. had begun his long speech. "I can't say positively that I'd recognize him if I saw him again, but I think I would. If ever I do, I'll certainly act and act quickly."

Nor could Jimmy know that he would one day be called upon to ratify that impetuous promise.

CHAPTER VIII

CROSSING THE LINE

"WE don't seem to be any nearer 'going over' than we were a week ago," grumbled Bob Dalton to Roger. "Here we're due to take another of those lovely hikes under full pack, through the sunny South, and come back to barracks to clean up for the next one. It's one merry daily round of hiking and scrubbing. The war'll be over before we even get as far as the station."

"Oh, I guess we'll get there in time to shoot a few lead pellets at the Boches," consoled Roger. "This is going to be some hike to-day. All our fellows of the 509th and part of another regiment, so I hear. Rather queer, isn't it?"

Seated next to Roger at mess, Bob's knife suddenly clattered to the table. Roger was eyeing him in a steady, peculiar fashion that brought a swift tide of red to his face.

"You don't mean—you don't think——" he stammered.

"Yep." Roger nodded sagely. "I guess the time has come. I'm surprised that *you* didn't guess it, too. I haven't said anything. I've been waiting for you fellows to tumble."

"I must be a wooden-head," muttered Bob. "You see we've been taking these hikes under full pack for over a week. Then we've been told right along that we'd probably not be going over for a month yet. I had an idea that when we did start we'd be told the day before and go to the station and all that. I'm getting rusty. I'd hate to try to hold my job again on the *Chronicle*. I'd get the boot the first thing for being a fat-head. How did you catch on to it, you quiet old turtle?"

Roger laughed.

"It was rather funny. Yesterday I heard Lieutenant Grayson tell the mail orderly to get him three special delivery stamps when he went to the post office for the mail. That started it. Then every once in a while all day I kept noticing little things that seemed to point that way. I may be away off, though. Only I know that more men are going out to-day than usual."

"Tell it to Blazes," was Bob's terse instruction, which Roger promptly obeyed.

"I hope we are really going," sighed Jimmy. "Not that I've anything against this camp except the blamed old mud. We've been well treated here and we've had a pretty good time

all around. Goodness only knows what's going to happen after we leave port. Anyhow, it's not worrying me. Now watch me break the glorious news to Iggy."

"So-o-o!" Ignace looked duly impressed as Jimmy told him. "I am the glad. Five letter have I my poor mothar write. Every time say, 'now go I over,' an' then no go. I no go soon so think she I am the liar."

"Your reputation's saved then," assured Roger. "Next time you write her you'll be on your way to France or I'm no prophet."

On leaving camp that morning under full pack, however, the expedition divided into platoons, set off toward the north over a route which had become familiar from frequent hikes. Well out of sight of camp, their course became north-easterly, gradually changing until they were marching directly east.

Continuing east until they reached a railroad about twelve miles from Camp Marvin, they came suddenly upon a waiting train. Under their olive-drab blouses, every heart thrilled at sight of it. It was quite simple to guess its reason for being there.

The work of entraining occupied some little time, but at last every Sammy was aboard. Ordered to get aboard as quietly as possible, there was no cheering as the train started. Neither were there any spectators to their departure, save the twittering birds in a not far

distant bit of woodland and a lonely yellow mule, who had evidently strayed away from the home of his darky master for a brief outing "on his own."

All day the train thumped over the rails bearing the Khaki Boys to a destination at which they could only hazard wild guesses. That they would eventually reach the coast they were sure. Whether it would be the Atlantic Coast or the Gulf Coast they did not know, nor did they much care. "All rivers run out to sea" was the watchword. Whether it took one day or two or even more to reach that "sea" they would presently reach it.

Though the train made few stops, little by little the travelers began to come into a knowledge of whither they were trending. The men who hailed from the South were first to recognize familiar towns and villages, which confirmed their opinion that they were on the way to a certain eastern seaport city where undoubtedly a transport awaited them. Gradually this news was circulated from car to car until what had seemed so obscure now became clear as crystal.

It was a long, tiresome journey, nevertheless, to this same seaport city. Now far from mess-kitchens and cooks, they were put upon the regulation Army ration of hardtack, coffee and what the Sammy calls "red horse," the Tommy "bully beef," and is known to the un-

initiated and commonplace civilian as "canned corned beef."

Midnight of the second day saw the Khaki Boys issuing from the train to make silent march through the deserted streets of a sleeping city. There was no moon visible in the cloudy sky and at that hour of the night their progress to the harbor was marked by few.

It being but a short distance from where they had detrained, it was not long until they found themselves traversing a covered way which ended in a gangplank. At last they had crossed the line that would divide them from their own country until the bitter fight had been won and the safety of the world was assured against the baleful curse of militarism.

Home lay behind them. Ahead of them lay unending peril and hardship which would test every particle of endurance they possessed. Some of them had taken final leave of their native land. Going forth to join the struggle in the hey-day of their manhood, there were many brave Sammies among that gallant company whose names would swell the casualty lists under that dreadful but glorious heading, "Killed in Action." Many a blank identification tag, to be filled in later, that now rested against warm, living flesh would one sad day drop from an envelope, torn open by the shaking hands of someone "back home."

The minds of the Khaki Boys were not oc-

cupied by such sad reflections as they trooped across the gangplank and down into the bowels of the ship. After many days of weary waiting the splendid chance had come. At last they were really on the way to "Going Over."

CHAPTER IX

THE TUNE THAT MADE THEM SAMMIES

THE last Sammy was hardly aboard when the ship slipped from its pier without so much as sounding a good-bye whistle. Ordered to preserve silence, no murmur of human voices was wafted to shore from its dark hulk, as it crept oceanward through the night. So the Khaki Boys sailed away, confidently believing that they were headed straight for France.

Deep down in the ship the enlisted men were making first acquaintance with their decidedly cramped quarters. Their bunks, they had discovered, were nothing more than a series of narrow shelves built two high and six deep. It became evident at first glance that to the outside man of each section would fall a far happier lot than that of the inside man. He would either have to be the last man out every morning or else perform the risky feat of stepping over five comrades without stepping on them, a pro-

cedure which called for egg-shell methods and much practice.

Worn out from two days' confinement in day coaches, in which one took one's sleep sitting upright, even these makeshift beds were not without virtue in the eyes of the weary soldiers. Their chief hardship consisted in the lack of fresh air. The necessary burning of lights down there meant the closing of the portholes, which must remain closed throughout the entire journey across. A single open hatch furnished the only passage of air into that great cavern, making it seem intolerably stuffy after the free open-air life which they had just left behind.

These discomforts amounted to nothing, however, in the opinion of one sorrowful-faced Sammy who, though secure in the advantage of being an "outside" man, refused to be comforted. For the first time since his enlistment in the Army, Ignace So Pulinski had been separated from his Brothers.

The line between the non-com and the private had fallen at last between him and them. They were above decks and he was below. Despite his oft scornfully repeated assertion, "Only the oomans cry!" Ignace was very near to tears as he lay on his narrow shelf and brooded over this new and unexpected cross.

Above decks in what had once been second-class staterooms of a remodeled German liner,

four very crestfallen young non-coms were sharing together a stateroom and their own sorrows. Bob, Jimmy, Roger and Franz Schnitzel, who had been invited to "bunk in" with them, were discussing in low and regretful voices the calamity of rank that had separated them from Ignace.

"Course we're glad to have you with us, Schnitz. You know that," Jimmy was saying. "But it's a howling shame that poor old Iggy's down there in the cellar, as you might say. I never thought it would be like this, though. I hadn't much idea of what it *would* be like."

"We know just about next to nothing now," grumbled Bob. "We know we're in a ship, that the ship's going and that we've landed somewhere above decks and Iggy's landed somewhere below. There you have all our knowledge in a nutshell."

"We'll know a good deal more than that by to-morrow night," meditated Roger. "You can't expect much coming aboard at midnight. All we can do is go to sleep and see what happens in the morning. By noon to-morrow things will be zipping along on regular routine. This ship'll be divided into posts, the guards'll be mounted, we'll start drilling and all will go about the same as ever. It's the way things happen in the Army."

"I'll never get used to it," groaned Jimmy. "After stretching my legs over miles of camp

I feel all penned up here. I'd about as soon be in the guardhouse."

"You're a cheerful bunch of crêpe," grinned Bob. "Brace up, the worst is yet to come. To-morrow you'll be seasick. Isn't that a glorious thought?"

"I won't," contradicted Jimmy. "I've crossed this old pond twice with Dad and Mother, long before the war, and was never a bit seasick. I've a motor-boat of my own at Bar Harbor. I can sail it to beat the band, too."

"Very fine!" lauded Bob. "Since you've made up your mind to can the *mal de mer*—just listen to my French—you may hold our weary heads when we get 'took' with it. How's that?"

"Hold your own head," retorted Jimmy ungraciously. "Wish old Iggy was a corp," he added wistfully.

Jimmy was still upset over his Polish brother's relegation to below decks. Perched on the edge of his berth, he sat staring gloomily down at his feet.

"A *corpse!*" Bob pretended to misunderstand. "That's a nice Christian wish!"

"Oh, you!" Jimmy frowned, then snickered. Looking up he beheld a trio of grinning faces bent on him. Under that genial gaze his dropping spirits began to rise. "I'm going to squash the gloom-bug," he declared, "and I'm

going to turn in at the same time. We all need sleep. First call will be routing us out before we've had a chance for forty winks."

"I know I'll be dead to the world in about four minutes from now," asserted Schnitzel. "I'm thankful for a chance to stretch out again."

This being the concerted opinion of all, the tired Khaki Boys promptly settled down, anxious to make the most of the brief period of rest that still remained to them.

With almost two thousand men on board to look after, the next day proved a busy one for the officers and the non-coms. The transport was now sailing well out of sight of land, her course known only to a few. With early dawn had come a dense fog which continued all day and was still in evidence that night when Taps sounded.

As the majority of the men had never before been out to sea they were keenly disappointed at not being able to get an early glimpse of the Atlantic from on board ship. Before night, however, many of them did not care whether or not they ever "saw the sea." They were getting a first taste of that nauseating complaint *mal de mer* (seasickness) and had reached a stage where nothing mattered much.

In spite of this temporary calamity those who were fit for drill were put through their paces. Regimental offices were opened, details

were assigned to policing the ship, setting-up exercises went on and company after company took its turn in hiking about the promenade deck. So passed the first day.

The second day broke clear, thus giving the coveted opportunity to view old Ocean at close range. By evening, however, it had grown to be less of a novelty. The Khaki Boys had soon become surfeited with the sight of an endless expanse of gray, restless water, with nothing to break the monotony save an occasional passing of ships. Even these quickly ceased to arouse interest. The transport prudently kept its distance from them and thus its passengers were unable to tell much about them.

With the dawn of the third day came another spell of fog that for rawness and density completely outrivaled the first visitation. The sounding of Tattoo that night saw the transport apparently moving in a wide circle about a wildly-tolling bell buoy.

"Listen to that!" exclaimed Jimmy to his three chums and Schnitzel, as they sat in their snug quarters talking over the day's events. "That's a bell buoy. I've been hearing it right along for the last half hour. I've heard something else, too; the noise of breakers. You can't tell me we're in mid-ocean. We're somewhere near a coast and shoal water. Maybe it's an island coast. Goodness only knows. But it's a coast, just the same."

"I'm no sailor but I've tumbled to this much. We're not even started for France yet," informed Bob. "We're still somewhere off the American coast. I thought at first we'd probably started across and would pretty soon bump into our convoy, waiting for us on one of these ocean highways. But if that was the case we'd have bumped into it before this. We're not going across by our lonesome, you can bet your boots on that. I told you fellows in the first place that I thought we were just stalling around a little before getting down to business."

"I guess that's about it," nodded Schnitzel. "We're probably not far from our convoy now and it's probably not far from the land of the free. A queer business, all around, isn't it?"

"Beats all the adventure stories I ever read when I was a kidlet," commented Jimmy. "I never expected then that I'd some day jump into the middle of real war and all that."

"I no like." Ignace's face had clouded as he listened to the conversation. "I no mean no like to be the solder. I think all time we go by France. Now more the days still have I stay the down below."

"Tough luck," sympathized Jimmy. "Never mind, old top. Once we do get to France you'll stay right with the gang if there's anything I can do to fix it up. You've earned a corporal's chevrons and I have a hunch you'll get 'em

before long. If we'd stayed at Sterling two weeks longer you would have had them, too. You can handle a squad all right, if you get a chance. It's your broken English that keeps you down."

"So think I." Ignace agreed mournfully. "Never I learn it that English so I spik it the good."

"You won't unless you study," shrugged Bob. "I'll bet you haven't looked at a book since we left Sterling. The trouble with you is that you're always putting the cart before the horse."

Ignace appeared slightly bewildered at this information. Not familiar with the old saying, he could not see what a cart and a horse had to do with his imperfections in English. "I no un'erstan' him that cart——"

"He means you get your words all mixed up, Iggy," smiled Roger. "I guess you can't help it. You'll have to win your chevrons by doing something to show 'em that you can hold down a corporal's job, English or no English. That'll be your best bet."

"So will I," vowed Ignace, with an air of grim finality that forbade any joking on the subject. "Now mus' go by my shelf to sleep. It is good that I am the outside on. So never I step on som' one, no get the cross word."

"You've put a new bee in his bonnet," laughed Bob after Ignace had gone below.

"He'll never rest until he's done something big and 'shown 'em.'"

"Hope he does and soon. In spite of his queer English he'd make a fine corp. He's learned his business now and knows it to a finish. He'd never lose his head in an emergency, and if he had charge of a squad he'd look out for it like a father. He'd feel his responsibility, which is the real thing after all."

Roger spoke with deep conviction.

"He'll soon have plenty of chance to show 'em," was Schnitzel's grave rejoinder. "If we're alive six months from now we'll all be veterans who've gone through enough to turn our hair white."

"Don't croak, Schnitz. It spoils sport. I don't want to talk about being a white-headed veteran. Just think how Bobby'd look with a cotton top. Oh, *my!* Go to bed, Schnitz, and forget the future."

"Yes, let the future go hang," avowed Jimmy. "We should worry."

Once prone to discuss the hazards of the big war, the four Brothers had lately changed their tactics. They had become soldier adventurers who resolutely declined to look further ahead than the end of the day. Since going aboard the transport their inclination to discuss what lay before them had daily lessened. Each felt the futility of it.

A clear sky greeted them the next morning,

with promise of plenty of sunshine later on. Daylight revealed the fact that they were entering a harbor, which offered a spectacle that made their hearts beat faster. They were indeed far from France; in fact, they had never left America.

The flock of great gray ships that graced the harbor were transports. They were to have plenty of soldier company, it seemed. There, too, was a liner which they guessed to be laden with high explosives, and best of all, their convoy, dauntless little destroyers, the relentless scourge of the submarine sharks.

This time no restriction of silence was enjoined. The men on the other transports crowded the rails and called out jubilantly to the new arrival. On one of the boats a band began to play "Dixie" evidently under the impression that the arriving transport was filled with southerners. Another band on another transport struck up, "We're Going Over." On the Khaki Boys' transport an excited young man was seen to hastily seek out the bandmaster and hold brief conversation with him. Presently across the sunlit water floated the lilting melody of "The Glory Road to France."

Standing at the rail with his bunkies, Jimmy Blaise's eyes sought Roger's as the first notes of his favorite song rose triumphantly on the morning air. He was thinking of a certain Saturday afternoon when two boys had stopped in

the street to listen to that same tune. Now they were hearing it again under vastly different circumstances.

"I asked 'em to play it," said Jimmy softly, speaking directly to Roger. "It's our tune, Rodge. It's the tune that put us in the Army."

CHAPTER X

THE "ONE CHANCE"

CONTRARY to expectation that the fleet would leave harbor at once, it lingered there until night. Under cover of the darkness, a majestic little procession of ships slipped away to the east, bound this time for France. For a day fair weather put all concerned in good spirits. With the second night, however, the wind rose, increasing to a gale that swept down upon the great, gray ships like a mad thing, and gave the majority of their occupants a taste of seasickness in earnest.

Boasting of his immunity from the malady, this time even Jimmy did not escape, though by sticking persistently on deck whenever possible he soon recovered. Bob, Roger and Schnitzel fared much worse. The storm did not abate and, in consequence, it was three or four days before they again felt like themselves.

Ignace, perhaps, suffered most of all. So far as they could, his Brothers made every effort to

alleviate his misery. Through the day when not on duty, he spent his time above decks with them. It was at night when below decks that his discomfort was greatest, this being the case also with the enlisted men who slept in the "pit," as they saw fit to name their lowly quarters.

So much sickness interfered considerably with military routine. Not only enlisted men, but non-coms and officers fell prey to the violent nausea, which invariably besets the landsman on his first sea voyage. Such officers as escaped it found themselves without men to drill. In many instances, whole squads contracted the habit of interrupting drill by making wild dashes to the scuppers, over which many a man hung until dragged away.

Due to this unhappy state of affairs, Jimmy had a good deal of leisure in which to look about his new quarters. Much of this leisure, however, he devoted to making himself of use to his stricken comrades.

Himself fortunate in having so quickly recovered, he felt the greatest sympathy for the men who were still under the weather. More than one of them had him to thank for some kindly service done them during those disastrous days of storm. By the eighth day, all but a few had recovered, and matters were progressing smoothly again.

One of the few who had not yet come into his

"sea legs" was Ignace. The hateful feeling of nausea stuck persistently to him. After the first four days, during which he merely crawled about, he managed to brace up sufficiently to perform his work, but that was all.

On the seventh day, Ignace had reported himself as feeling "a little the better." A run of choppy sea on the eighth upset him again. Disgusted with life, he had sought his bunk that afternoon the moment drill was over, and resigned himself to the clutches of his relentless enemy.

It was on this same afternoon that Jimmy Blaise received a shock that thrilled him through and through. It came as the result of a descent into the "pit" to look after his suffering Brother. Ignace, however, had reached the ungracious stage of wishing nothing save to be let alone. Deciding that his room was better than his company, Jimmy cut his mercy call short, resolving to return at supper time. If Ignace were then no better, he intended to march him off to hospital for treatment.

Emerging from the stairway onto the first deck above the "pit," his eyes chanced to light on a man leaning over the rail. His back to Jimmy, he was gazing intently out over the water, his right arm raised to the level of his eyes, as though holding binoculars to them. From his clothing, Jimmy judged him to be one of the stokers who, having finished his detail,

had stepped on deck for a breath of air. It was strange, he thought, that a stoker should be handling binoculars. Yet this was not what had most attracted his attention to the man and fixed it.

There was something evasively familiar in the poise of the burly figure, and the shock of black hair that showed plainly under the man's small cap.

His eyes resting in troubled fashion on the stoker, Jimmy tried to place him. As though unconsciously drawn by the intent scrutiny, the man turned slowly from the rail, dropping something into a pocket of his overalls. Very deliberately he took off his cap, and wiped his forehead with it as he turned.

It was then that he saw the young sergeant. Immediately he looked away, left the rail and sauntered off, disappearing down a stairway farther up the deck.

Hardly breathing, Jimmy watched him out of sight. His head was spinning dizzily, and his knees were weak with the shock of discovery. He had come into a dismayed understanding of why the fellow's general bulk had seemed so familiar. The moment the man had removed his cap, releasing his thick, black hair, light had dawned upon Jimmy. He could never forget that luxuriant crop of hair or the way it waved back and upward from the forehead.

Here on the troopship, the last place he would

have believed it might happen, he had come upon the man who had attacked the sentries under the bridge at Camp Marvin!

CHAPTER XI

"ACTING QUICKLY"

THE man gone, Jimmy's startled faculties began to collect themselves. How had the fellow come here, and for what purpose? His presence as a stoker on a troopship meant that he had been hired by the United States Government. His purpose—to work. But such work as he was here to perform would never result in any good to the ship.

Perhaps he intended to blow it up. If so, why had he waited this long? It would have been easier for him to do it three days ago while the storm raged and seasickness claimed heavy toll. Perhaps he valued his own life too highly for that. If this were the case, then he was not merely a pro-German fanatic. Such an one would willingly die with his victims for the sake of revenge.

In the midst of these reflections, the warning call to "boat drill" sent Jimmy scurrying up the stairs to the promenade deck and to his station.

Despite seasickness "boat drill" had been rigidly performed from the second day out. At the ringing of a gong, which was likely to sound at an unexpected moment, every man on board who was able to be about proceeded to an assigned station and lined up in "company front."

Among the military units on board were a number of men who had been sailors. These had been formed into squads, and ordered to stand before every set of davits on the top deck, ready to lower the boats, which, hung out and provisioned, swung clear from the deck below. Into each boat then climbed eight soldier-sailors, whose duties consisted not only in keeping the boats free of trouble during their descent into the water, but in afterward manning them.

Along the rail on the promenade deck the remainder of the ship's occupants stood formed into platoons, each platoon under a proper officer. It was the duty of these officers to tell off the number of men in pairs, who were to descend the rope ladders and enter a boat, immediately it was launched.

No one save the officers was allowed to speak unless addressed, or to move unless ordered. Insubordination on the part of any man meant instant death by shooting. Officers had been instructed that should such trouble arise, they were to shoot to kill.

Such was the precaution drill that was practised by day, and frequently by night Often in

darkness, always in silence, the entire ship's company would respond and be in their places inside of five minutes after the alarm sounded.

His attention centered on the serious business of the boat drill, Jimmy was forced to put the disquieting discovery he had made out of his mind for the time being. The moment the drill was over his troubled brain resumed it again, as he walked to his cabin to get ready for supper. It was now quite dark. Mess call would sound very shortly. Should he wait until after mess or at once report his suspicions to headquarters?

He was certain of his man, yet what proof had he to substantiate that certainty? He did not know the fellow's name. He could only describe him to the commander. Undoubtedly, his story would result in an instant investigation. The stakes were too high to permit even the suspicion of any enemy's presence on board to go unchallenged. He would be ordered to accompany a guard detail about ship in order to find and point out the man.

This in itself did not dismay him. The only thing he did not quite like to think about was the bare possibility that he might be creating trouble for an innocent man. Resemblances were often very tricky. His accusation would, no doubt, place the man in confinement until the end of the voyage. No chances would be taken in a matter of such grave import. The man

would be held until thorough investigation had been made regarding him. Still, had not Major Warren said that it was a serious thing to hold an innocent man for a crime, but even more serious to allow a guilty man to escape?

"There goes supper call. Wish I knew what to do," Jimmy muttered, his hand on the door of his stateroom.

The door opening suddenly, Bob, Schnitzel and Roger piled out with a rush that nearly knocked him over.

"Why don't you look where you're going?" Jimmy demanded a trifle crossly.

"How can we see through a door?" countered Bob. "What do you mean by eavesdropping?"

"Yes," teased Roger, "how long have you been standing there? That's what *I'd* like to know."

Jimmy's brief vexation vanished. "I wouldn't waste my time spying on *you*," he retaliated with a grin. "Out of my sight. Go and get it and leave me alone. I'll be in good company then."

"Aren't you eating to-night?" asked Schnitzel.

"Uh-huh; but not yet. Go ahead. I'll be with you soon. I want to make myself beautiful for mess, so that you'll appreciate me."

"You've a hard job ahead of you," flung back Bob, as the trio walked off, laughing.

Jimmy smiled to himself, as he entered the

little room, and proceeded to give his hair and his uniform a hasty "once over." Surveying his hands, he decided that they needed washing. Making his way to a lavatory used by the non-coms, he washed his hands, returned his towel to the stateroom and set off for mess. On the way he recalled his resolve concerning Ignace.

Dashing down into the "pit" on his errand of mercy, Jimmy found Ignace sleeping so peacefully he had not the heart to awaken him. Retracing his steps, his head emerged above the stairway to encounter a sight that made him halt instantly. Standing by the rail, where he had stood only recently, was the man on whom Jimmy's mind was centered.

Although the deck was comparatively dark, owing to orders that prohibited the burning of exterior lights after sunset, a kerosene bracket lamp, well shaded, and fastened above the stairway, had revealed his presence to Jimmy.

Again the man's broad back was directly toward the young sergeant. As Jimmy stood watching him, a long flash of white appeared to leap out from the immobile figure and across the dark waters. It proceeded from a powerful flashlight in the man's hands. An instant, and he whirled and made a lightning dash for the stairway.

"Got you!"

As the man's fleeing feet touched the top step of the stairs, a lithe form popped up out

of the stairway and caught him by the legs. Jimmy Blaise had not forgotten how to "tackle." Came the thump of a heavy body, as it struck the floor of the deck. Jimmy let go, and launched himself straight upon his fallen catch, his voice raised in a resonant yell for the guard.

In the same instant the man shot up from the deck with a desperate accession of strength that almost freed him of his captor's body, but not quite. Feeling himself going, Jimmy's right arm lashed out in a lightning grab for the other man's legs. He managed to catch one of them, and clung to it. Snarling like a beast, his quarry's free foot went into brutal action, planting a savage kick full on the young sergeant's chest.

Faint with pain, his brain reeling, the plucky lad still hung on. And then came the guard, along with others, all of whom poor Jimmy saw as indistinct blots gathered about him.

Rallying his fast flickering consciousness, Jimmy mumbled indistinctly: "Hang—on—to—him! Signaling—a—sub. Look—out——" then collapsed into the first faint of his life.

He had "acted" and "acted quickly." Now it was up to someone else to do the rest.

CHAPTER XII

A STRANGE STORY

"SOMEONE else" was quite ready to do the rest. Ever on the alert for danger, the unwarranted play of the powerful flashlight in the hands of the traitor had been already seen from the *Dauntless,* a destroyer nearest to the *Columbia.* Such an amazing procedure provoking instant suspicion, the destroyer's own searchlight went into immediate action, sweeping the black waste of waters in the direction toward which the signal had been made.

The *Columbia* being the rear transport of the fleet, her sailing position was such as to court submarine attack. On this account, she had been under even closer supervision than her sister ships.

While the *Columbia's* gong was sending out a furious clanging for boat drill, the guns of the *Dauntless* spoke. The destroyer was strictly on the job. Had she freed the sea of one more

pest, or would the flying death yet tear its devastating way into the very heart of the transport?

Already the *Columbia's* boats had been swung into the water, and the men were piling down the ladders into them. Packed in the boats or crowding the rail of the promenade deck, awaiting their turn to descend, Uncle Sam's Boys did themselves proud during that brief season of dread. The constant rattling discharge of the rapid-fire guns fell like music on their ears, as they waited in silence, hovering between life and death.

During that period of torturing suspense, there was not a man among them who did not show himself calm and resolute in the face of danger. Even Jimmy Blaise, quickly reviving from his brief lapse into insensibility, insisted on staggering to his station, declining to "let a little thing like that" down him.

An hour later the *Columbia* was speeding along again, precisely as though nothing had happened. All over the ship, however, excitement ran high. Recovered from the first shock of the near-catastrophe, the all-important question was whether or not the *Dauntless* had "got the U-boat."

Of the events leading up to the scare, little was known, except that it had been most unexpected. Still well outside the "murder zone," it had seemed rather early in the game for a

U-boat to make its appearance. Mess had been in full swing when the alarm had sounded. In consequence, not many knew of the dramatic little scene enacted on the lower deck.

In the commandant's office a very pale, but self-reliant, young man, was telling a story to his commanding officer, and a number of other officers, which made them stare. Still shaky from the kick given him by the supposed stoker, now ironed and in the brig, Jimmy was pouring forth his tale in his usual direct, boyish fashion.

"I told Major Warren, back at Camp Marvin, that I'd know the fellow if ever I saw him again," he was saying. "The minute I caught a glimpse of his back it gave me a queer thrill. Then he turned around, dropped his glasses into a pocket, took off his cap and wiped his forehead with it. I was sure of him then. I'd never forget that high forehead and that mop of coarse, black hair. While I was trying to think what to do next, he went away and then the gong rang for boat drill. After that it was time for mess.

"I went to my stateroom to tidy myself, and when I came out I thought I'd take a run down below to see a bunkie who was sick. Just as I came upstairs I saw this fellow again. So I stopped in the stairway to watch him.

"He was acting queerly. His back was to me, and he was moving his right arm a little. I saw a white light coming and going, and I knew he

was signaling to someone out at sea. It was only a minute. Then he whirled and bolted for the stairs, and I tackled him. He went down and I jumped on him, but he popped up in a hurry and almost shook me off. I grabbed one of his legs, and he kicked me a hard one. Then I went to sleep for a minute."

Jimmy looked heartily disgusted with himself.

"Quite natural, under the circumstances," assured the commander with a smile that was reflected on the faces of the other officers present. "You are lucky to be standing there, my man. Now you are to go to hospital at once, and remain there to-night. To-morrow I will take this matter up with you again."

This order did not in the least suit Jimmy. In the first place he was very hungry. The moment he was free of the commandant, he had planned to invade the canteen and "fill up" on such delicacies as it offered. Then, too, he was wild to get back to his bunkies and talk himself hoarse. Naturally, he could not explain all this to his superior officer. All he could do was obey.

"I suppose I put a crimp in that young man's plans by ordering him to hospital," was the commandant's dry comment, as the door closed on the crestfallen sergeant. "He is aching to get back to those bunkies of his. Wonderful, the hard knocks these men will stand and then

come up smiling. That brute in the brig would make three of him. He showed clear grit in tackling him a second time. That is, if this fellow is the same man he fought at Marvin. Blaise seems certain of that."

"What I can't understand, sir," remarked a captain, "is how this man managed to get work on a troopship. The men employed by the government for this work are obliged to undergo a most searching grilling in order to ascertain whether they are to be trusted aboard a transport."

"This fiend is undoubtedly possessed of great intelligence and resource," mused the commandant. "He must also be in direct touch with the Central Powers. The most peculiar part of this affair is: How did the fellow know of the proximity of a submarine? He had no means of learning the course of the fleet beforehand. There are no German submarine bases on the American coast

"We know, therefore, that no U-boat followed us from the start. We are still well outside the danger zone. It takes a large submarine, and a daring commander, to come out this far to attack. There is more to this than appears on the surface. I shall take up the matter to-morrow from a certain angle where I suspect treachery may exist. There is but one way in which an enemy could learn our movements—via wireless," he concluded grimly. "I

shall take steps to discover at once whether we have another traitor aboard."

"The fellow must have been crazy to imagine he could signal without attracting attention," observed another officer. "He must have known, too, that he was throwing away his own life."

"These Boches are always ready to take a long chance. The *Columbia* is the rear ship of the fleet. That was in the enemy's favor. The U-boat or boats might not have attacked for some time after he signaled. They, or it, perhaps, wanted to get a line on the fleet, and trail it awhile before torpedoing. Again it may be that this man had a special grudge against the *Columbia.*

"We can't know these things just yet. We may never know them. I understand this wretch hasn't spoken a word since he was turned over to the guard. It is hard to get to the bottom of these intricate German plots. Death is nothing to those who concoct them. They are fanatics when it comes to the 'Fatherland.' If I had my way, I'd have this fellow shot at sunrise. His possible connection with the Camp Marvin affair will have to be looked into, as well as a good deal else concerning him. He may be a German spy, much wanted by Secret Service, for all we yet know of him. Blaise may have captured a prize."

Tucked away on his narrow cot in hospital,

"Blaise" was a very disappointed and hungry young sergeant. He did not so much mind being hungry, but he did mind keeping quiet when he wanted to talk.

"I'll beat it out of here on the run at First Call to-morrow," was his slightly consoling reflection. "I wonder if the fellows know what's happened to Blazes?"

Up in their stateroom the "fellows" were listening with all their ears to resourceful Bob, who had just returned from a hunt for Jimmy. While on it he had garnered news that sent him back to his bunkies on a run. A friendly guard had very kindly "put him wise."

"That U-boat scare wasn't the only thing that came off to-night," he greeted, as he burst into the room. Hardly pausing for breath, he rattled off his news to an astounded trio of listeners. "I guess you know who he jumped. If you don't, I do!" Bob's voice rose on the last word. "I'll bet you my pay for the next two months that it was the guy under the bridge. The guard didn't say so, of course. What does he know about it! Nobody told me. I've just had a hunch as to who's who in the brig."

"But Blazes would have jumped *any* fellow he saw swinging a light like that," reminded Roger. "What could that bridge fellow be doing on this ship? You're crazy, Bob."

"I don't know and I don't care. I only know I've got a hunch. Blazes is tucked away in hos-

pital, so I can't prove that my hunch is a hunch until I see him. We might get a permit to go and see him before Taps. The guard said he was walking around after the fight."

"We'd better not," objected Schnitzel. "He may be asleep."

"Asleep nothing!" scoffed Bob. "I'll bet he's the sorest Blazes that ever blazed. It's the hand of headquarters that put him to bed in hospital. He'd never go there on his own. If you killed that boy he'd never know it unless somebody told him about it. He'd keep right on going!".

CHAPTER XIII

TALKING IT OVER

AT First Call the next morning, Jimmy bounced out of bed with a will which quite convinced the hospital orderly that he was a well man. Nor did he confide to the latter how sore his chest was. Not many minutes later he was hurrying to his stateroom to snatch a few words with his bunkies before roll call. Though he had a "game" chest, there was nothing wrong with his feet.

"Hey, you Blazes!" was the concerted greeting that welled from three throats, as he slammed the door behind him.

"Gee, but I'm glad to be back!" he exclaimed. "I was crazy to be here last night. The K. O. couldn't see it, though. I've got a lot to——"

"Was it the bridge guy?" almost shouted Bob. "Out with it, quick!"

"Yep. It was——"

"I knew it! Told you I had a hunch."

Bob pranced about, waving one shoe over his head.

"The same old smile," went on Jimmy. "First time we met, he never knew what I looked like. Now he knows, I guess. It won't do him any good, though. This time he's canned for keeps. He'll be porous all right when the U. S. A. gets through with him. Wait until mess, and I'll spill the whole dope. I want Iggy to hear it. How is he? He was asleep at supper time last night. If I hadn't gone to see him, I'd never have caught our bridge friend at his tricks. More about that later. What about Iggins?"

"He's better," replied Roger. "He was here for a while last night after the sub scare, and stayed until Tattoo. Said he'd had a little sleep, and wasn't 'sick the queer' any more. *You* had us guessing. None of us knew where *you* were. We looked for you when the call to boats came, but didn't see you. Bob nosed around afterward, and found out a few things." Roger was dressing hurriedly as he talked. "Some night, wasn't it?"

"I thought every minute would be our last. I was at my station, all right enough, only yours was too far away for you to see me. You couldn't have told who was who, anyway. Our fellows behaved like bricks. Not a yellow dog among 'em. *Men,* every last Sammy."

Reveille now sounding, the chat ended, to be continued afterward at mess. Seated among his bunkies, Jimmy again went over his part in last night's events.

"I'm to go before the K. O. again to-day. Maybe I'll have to face the fellow there. Don't know. I'd just as soon. I'm not afraid of him. He's a dead one already. I'd hate to have him get a chance at me, though. He's a terror. He shook me off of him last night as if I'd been a cloud of dust. And the kick he handed me! Uh-h!"

Jimmy groaned and gingerly patted his chest. Merely to touch it made him wince.

His conjecture that he might be brought face to face with the prisoner was verified late that afternoon. Ordered to report to headquarters, he found the prisoner there ahead of him, ironed and securely guarded.

"Sergeant Blaise, take a good look at this man," were the K. O.'s first words, after Jimmy had come to attention before him.

Jimmy obeyed. For the first time he had ample opportunity for a close and comprehensive survey of the man who had twice figured so strangely in his Army life. He saw a broad, rather full face, the cheek bones high, lighted by a pair of wild, black eyes.

He noted the straight-lipped, sneering mouth, the nervous twitch of the wide-open nostrils, and that familiar forehead with the heavy black

hair waving back from it. The whole effect was rather terrifying, he thought.

His eyes wandered from the muscular shoulders to the unusually long arms, and down and over the man's stocky form. There was a look of tigerish strength about him that suggested the prowling jungle beast. Jimmy did not wonder that the two sentries had been so quickly overcome. He marvelled that he had managed to escape death at the fellow's hands, on that dark night under the bridge.

"This is the man I saw choking the sentry at Camp Marvin, sir," he said finally, addressing the K. O. in steady, resonant tones.

"You are sure of it?"

"Yes, sir. I never before had a really good look at his face, but I know that forehead and hair. I've never forgotten 'em."

"Very good. Now stand aside, Blaise."

The K. O. turned harshly to the prisoner. "You hear what this man says?"

Up to this moment the latter had stubbornly refused to open his lips. Now, to the surprise of all, he spoke.

"The man is mistaken," he said in a level tone that betrayed no hint of a foreign accent. "I have never been in the South. My home is in New York."

"Who said Camp Marvin was in the South?" asked the K. O., hoping thus to confuse the prisoner.

"Every good American knows where Camp Marvin is," shrugged the man.

"Do you dare call yourself a good American?" thundered the commandant.

"Why not?" countered the man imperturbably. "I was born in America, of American parents. I left a good position to sail on this troopship, because I wanted to do my bit for the United States."

"Rubbish!" exploded the K. O. "You mean you were *doing your bit for Germany* last night when you pointed out the *Columbia* to a U-boat."

"You are mistaken," came the even contradiction. "Such a thing could not be."

"What about the flashlight you were using when Blaise caught you at it?"

"The man is mistaken," patiently sounded the repetition. "I have no flashlight. You must know from the search by your guard of my belongings that I have none."

"You *had* one. Unfortunately, our guard can't patrol the bottom of the sea for it. You dropped it overboard when you finished your fiendish signaling."

"I *had* no flashlight," emphasized the prisoner.

After half an hour of futile grilling, the K. O. ordered the guard to return the man to the brig. As the latter passed Jimmy, he measured the young sergeant with a long, in-

scrutable glance that sent a chill to Jimmy's heart. In those glittering, black eyes he read the very acme of hatred, made more terrible by the seeming impersonality of the glance. He could not help feeling relieved to know that he was forever beyond the reach of those ape-like arms.

"Whew!" he sighed gustily, as he entered the stateroom where, drill over for the day, his four bunkies had collected to await his return. Retreat had sounded while he was at headquarters. There now remained time for a few minutes' talk before mess.

"What's the good word? Did he 'fess up'?"

All animation, Bob sprang from his berth, a lower one, where he had been lounging.

"He did—not." Jimmy motioned for Roger to move over, and sat down beside him. "He said I was mistaken. He's the coolest proposition you ever heard talk. Said he was a loyal American! Whoops, baby! The K. O. said 'Rubbish.' The fellow said he came aboard to do his bit for the U. S. The K. O. said he meant 'for Germany.' That bridge guy is some fox. He never gave himself away for half a second.

"Finally the K. O. canned him, and had him led back to the jug. You should have seen the look he gave me as he went past me. It was like—well—it was like ice with a hot fire burning underneath. That's the only way I can describe it. Gee whiz! How that brute hates me!

He *is* a brute. There's something about him that makes you think of a tiger getting ready to spring."

Jimmy gave an involuntary shudder.

"You act as if he'd got your goat," disapproved Bob. "You're wobbly, Blazes, or you wouldn't shiver like that. You'd better turn in right after mess and sleep it off."

"Oh, I'm O. K. Just a little bit tired. That's all. I guess I *will* turn in early, though. Hope there won't be a call for boat drill just about the time I get nicely asleep."

"I don't believe there will be," opinioned Roger. "Last night showed what the men could do. Besides, we've had one to-day already."

"Wonder if the *Dauntless* plugged a U? I heard so, but nobody seems to know exactly." It was Schnitzel who spoke. "There was one around, all right enough. Funny it didn't get busy the minute the fellow flashed that signal."

"It probably had a game of its own to play. It might have been so sure of getting us that it hung fire a minute too long. These Boches are clever, but once in a while they get so smart they get careless. If the commander of that sub bungled his job last night, I'd hate to stand in his shoes. Battling Bill will never, *never* like him again."

Bob grinned derisively at his own inspirational naming of the Kaiser.

"It's going to be a game of dodge from now on," predicted Roger. "We're not so very far from the danger zone. I was told that we expected to make the trip in a fortnight. I suppose it all depends on how much of a roundabout course we've taken."

"It seems queer to scud along day after day without knowing where we are or a thing about it, except that we're on our way," mused Schnitzel.

"I'm just as well pleased to be kept in the dark. If I knew too much I might get chesty and try to run the Army. Let George—I mean Pershing—do it. What's on your mind, Ignace So?"

Bob pointed a finger at the Pole with a suddenness that made him jump. Ignace was, as usual, listening solemnly and saying nothing.

"I am the sad," came the sighing answer. "Roger say me 'you want be it the cor-poor-al you show 'em how you are the ready.' So think I it to do. Now all thees time do nothin' for that I am the seeck. It is the shame that I am it the no good."

"Well, you aren't to blame for getting seasick," consoled Bob. "Besides, you've had no chance to show 'em. Don't worry over not getting what you want when you want it, old man. You'll only shoo away luck. Can your corporalish yearnings and you'll come into your own when you least expect it. If you keep think-

ing about 'em all the time you'll forget to be a good private and so run into a snag."

This was sound but not specially cheering advice. The corporal bee was buzzing hard in Ignace's bonnet. He regarded his temporary exile to the "pit" as a forerunner of other separations from his Brothers, which would ensue as a result of his chevronless state.

"You'll stay with the gang, Iggy, when we get 'over there,'" Jimmy hastened to assure the disconsolate one for the twentieth time. "You won't have to be a corp to do that. We'll all be in barracks for quite a while after we land in France. We're only about half trained yet. We've still a lot to learn before we hit the trenches."

"Mebbe never get by France." Ignace appeared to derive a melancholy satisfaction out of this dire supposition.

"Listen to the perfect pessimist," groaned Bob. "You old calamity croaker. Sure we're going to 'get by France.' There goes mess call. It's a good thing. I may 'never get by France,' but I'm certainly going to 'get by' mess as fast as my legs'll carry me. Even old Iggy Indigo can't spoil my appetite."

CHAPTER XIV

THREE TIMES AND OUT

AMID fair but cold weather, the fleet of transports swept well into the danger zone. Every man aboard them knew that they had entered it, because of the new order which went forth. Drilling, resting, or eating, from then on until port was made, he must wear his life-preserver. On going to bed at night he might remove it. He must sleep in his clothes, however, his life-belt within easy reach.

On every ship an extra submarine guard was mounted. Then a new variety of target practice began. It consisted in the throwing overboard of buoys and shooting at them from a long range. Despite their constantly growing peril, the Khaki Boys hugely enjoyed this part of the precaution game. The recognized ability of the American soldier to shoot at a mark and hit it was efficiently demonstrated during these last few hazardous days of voyage. Four out

of five times their shots hit the buoys instead of the waves on which they floated.

"Can we hit 'em? Well, I guess!" crowed Bob Dalton one evening, as the fleet drew nearer to the end of their passage through the perilous zone. Drill for the day having ended with target practice, followed by Retreat, the three brothers and Schnitzel were spending the evening in an industrious cleaning of their rifles, anxious to put them in good condition before Taps sounded.

"It's great sport, isn't it?" glowed Jimmy. "I never knew until lately what a good shot I was."

"Listen to that." Bob winked at Roger. "Some little sharpshooter, that boy Blazes."

"*He* thinks so." Roger returned the wink. "That was a funny one about those sticks floating on the water this morning, wasn't it? Did you see them?"

"I certainly did. One of 'em bobbed up on the port side. The other was right off our starboard bow. They had us all guessing for a few minutes whether they were periscopes. They were just a couple of old targets tossed overboard by some ship going along ahead of us."

"That's the second scare we've had," commented Schnitzel. "Three times and out. The next one will be the real thing."

"There you go croaking again, Schnitz. If it comes it'll have to come soon. I don't see

much to worry about now. With those perky English destroyers scooting around the fleet all the time, I guess we're fairly safe," Jimmy maintained optimistically.

"They are dandy, saucy fellows," admired Roger. "I love to watch them circling and zipping around the transports. They certainly can go, too."

"By to-morrow morning we ought to be off the Irish coast," declared Bob. "After that it won't be long until we'll feel the good solid ground under our feet again. When I was about fifteen, I was crazy to be a sailor. I'm wiser now. I've had enough voyage this trip to last me till the war's over. Then I don't mind making one back to the U. S. Only I wouldn't want it to be next week."

"Oh, you'll probably be allowed to stay a few days longer than that," was Jimmy's sardonic assurance.

"Wonder what'll be done with our dear prisoner," remarked Bob irrelevantly. "I hear that the English town where we're to debark is under military law and policed by U. S. marines. I suppose he'll be held there for a court-martial. You'll probably be stuck there, too, as a witness. You seem to be about the only witness in the case against the fellow. I'd like to get a look at him. I hope I'm around when they lead him off ship."

"We're not likely to get a squint at him,"

discouraged Roger. "He'll be hustled off to an English jug while we're busy with our own affairs."

"I'll bet the K. O.'s been trying hard to get a line on him," pursued Bob. "I don't believe he'd use wireless to find out, though. He wouldn't risk having his messages snipped out of the air by the Boches. It's safer to sit back and receive wireless than it is to send. He'll probably cable to the U. S. authorities about the fellow. Wish he'd let me interview the accused."

"You'll never get over the reporter habit, will you, Bob?" smiled Jimmy. "You want to see everything and find out everything."

"Why not?" Bob demanded. "There are some interesting facts to dig up in this case. For instance, what the fellow's real name is. He shipped as Charles Black. That's a dead give-away. His real name's probably Karl Schwartzberger, or something like that. How did he keep in touch with a U-boat? That's another queer thing. He must have been, or why would he have signaled unless he had somebody to signal to. Whom did he pal with on the *Columbia?*

"I'd like to know the answers to these questions. Might as well grab at the moon, though. In the Army the powers that be don't let the right hand know what the left's doing. A fat chance a poor corp like Bobby has of getting

wise to what's going on. Wish they'd give me a show."

"What would you do?" Roger asked, with a view to drawing Bob out. He guessed that Bob's fertile brain had been busy evolving a theory of its own about the affair, which he burned to expound.

"I'd like to put Schnitz in the brig with this Black, and I'd like to be sent to watch wireless," was the quick response. "If I dared, I'd go and ask the K. O. to run Schnitz in on a trumped-up charge of trying to queer some part of the ship's machinery. If this man was a Boche, Schnitz would spot him the same as he did Freidrich. I know a little about wireless. I've a friend who's an operator. He taught me quite a lot about it, long before I enlisted."

"Pleasant job you've cut out for me," satirized Schnitzel. "I had one experience of the kind I——"

"Would you do it?" interrupted Bob sharply.

"I—yes, I guess I would, as long as it would be for the good of the U. S. I'd hate it, though. I hated the other job. I hated that spy more, though." Schnitzel's face grew dark with reminiscence. "But what's the use in talking about it? You wouldn't dare propose it at headquarters. You'd get snubbed to a finish."

"Don't I know it?" Bob gave a final energetic polish to his rifle barrel, and put the firearm tenderly away.

"I guess I'll go on deck."

With this casual observation, Jimmy put away his own rifle and left the room. He had listened in silence to Bob's remarks. Now he wondered if he dared go to the K. O., and propose his bunkie's plan. Having a personal interest in the case himself, the K. O. might not snub him.

He wondered if the two wireless operators were already under suspicion. Both soldiers, he knew them by sight. He had often seen them coming or going from the part of the ship where the wireless apparatus was situated. No one save commissioned officers or operators were allowed near it.

He knew enough about wireless telegraphy to understand that it would be very hard for an operator on board the *Columbia* to send a message of his own and "get away with it." If he were ordered by someone of authority on board ship to send one, he might then manage to send his own directly afterward, pretending the two to be one. The noisy crackle and flash of the instrument would forbid the sending of an unauthorized message by itself.

Again, if he succeeded in "putting it over," it would be open to any ship that happened to pick it up, provided it could be translated to mean anything. It stood to reason, however, that an operator in league with the enemy would use a code in sending such a message.

Occupied with these musings, Jimmy went slowly down the stairs to the first deck below his stateroom. A cloudy day had merged into an unusually black night. Later there would be a moon, provided the heavy clouds lifted that now blotted out the stars. The wind, though not strong, was searching, and a new dampness was in the air that chilled to the bone.

"Brrr!" Jimmy shivered, but did not turn back to the warmth of his stateroom. In spite of the cold, he preferred to stop for a little in the open air. Almost every evening before Call to Quarters blew, he would slip on deck by himself for a few minutes and let his thoughts wander across the wide expanse of restless sea to his "folks." Though they were frequently in his thoughts at other times, they seemed curiously nearer to him at this hour of the evening.

He had felt no such wistful yearning while in camp. It was only since he had been out at sea that he craved this brief season of communion in spirit with home. Not for worlds would he have spoken of it to his bunkies. There were some things "a fellow just couldn't talk about." He was ready and willing to give his life for his country. He was glad to be a Khaki Boy. He was also glad that he would never outgrow sorely missing his father and mother.

He never allowed himself to think of himself as not eventually returning to them. He was

possessed of a firm belief that somehow he would win through, and one day go back to the good old United States with the proud satisfaction of having loyally played his part in the big war.

His thoughts running along much in this strain, as he stood there in the gloom, he could image his mother as she sat at home in the cozy living room waiting for dad to come home from his club, bringing the latest editions of the evening papers with him.

He could see his father hurry from the motor and up the steps of the broad veranda. He could see him entering the living room to meet the upraised, questioning glance of his mother's soft eyes. He could almost hear his father's hearty reassurance: "No report of any transports sunk to-day, dear. So far our boy is safe——"

Call to Quarters suddenly broke in on Jimmy's fond reverie. Turning from the rail, he started obediently in the direction of his stateroom. Of a sudden the deck floor quivered and rocked under his feet.

A jarring tremor seemed to sweep the ship from bow to stern. He heard a dull, muffled crash, and was hurled violently forward to the deck floor.

Briefly stunned, he lay blinking dazedly. A moment and the sinister silence that followed that muffled crash was broken by the warning

clang of a gong, frantically rung. This time it was a genuine call to boat drill, and no false alarm.

Above it voices of officers began to ring out in shouted orders to the men. Soon a steady thudding of moving feet began. The rhythmic quality of that sound indicated that there was no panic aboard. The men were marching coolly and resolutely to their stations. In the face of destruction, they were proving their mettle. No cries of fear and terror rent the night. There was no frenzied running about. The Khaki Boys were admirably showing the result of their training.

At the first clang of the gong, Jimmy regained his feet. Now that the long-dreaded disaster had actually come, he marveled that he should accept it so calmly. He felt not the slightest emotion of fear, as he strode composedly off to his station.

On the way to it, he encountered comrade after comrade. Many of them only partially dressed, each was seeking his own place with steady eyes and firm, unfaltering step. Barely had he arrived at the point near the rail of the promenade deck, where he belonged, when the doomed ship took a heavy tilt to starboard. He felt himself hurled against the railing.

Catching hold of it, he clung desperately. He knew that all along that rail his comrades were hanging on in that same dogged fashion. An-

other such list of the ship, and they would all land in the icy water, there to make their fight for life as best they might.

Somehow, Jimmy could not vizualize himself as being dragged under by the predatory arms of the sea. Standing on the brink of death, an inner voice sang to him of life yet to be lived, of deeds yet to be done.

CHAPTER XV

THE END OF THE "COLUMBIA"

AMID fell silence, broken only by the resonant commands of the officers, the lowering of the life-boats went on.

Struck amidships by the torpedo, the *Columbia* would have gone on plowing through the water, had not the second engineer showed remarkable presence of mind. By throwing the engine levers over to "full," he brought the doomed ship to a dead stop, which prevented the smashing of the davits that held the life-boats.

A gaping hole torn in her starboard side, the *Columbia* heeled over at a dangerous angle. This elevated the boats on the port side to a height impossible for safe launching. As soon as they struck the water they capsized, pitching their occupants into the sea.

On the starboard side, matters progressed more smoothly. By this time a few of the men,

trusting to their life belts, had jumped into the water.

Franz Schnitzel and the four Brothers were not among the number, however. Recovered from the first shock of the catastrophe, they thought of others rather than themselves. Four of them non-coms, it became their duty to consider the good of their men.

Schnitzel, Roger and Ignace were on the port side when the disastrous launching of the boats occurred. None of them had been in the boats, all having stood back to give other men a first chance for life.

The capsizing of the life boats might have been followed by a panic-stricken exodus into the water of the men who were still waiting to descend into them on the port side, had not a stentorian voice suddenly bawled out from far forward:

"No jump! Destroyer him come!"

Some one else took up the cry, and passed it down the line. Ere its echoes had died away, a destroyer had, indeed, emerged out of the darkness and drawn up alongside the *Columbia*.

Recovered from their surprise at this unexpected and gallant move on the part of its British commander, an orderly scramble began to drop from the elevated port side into the rescuing destroyer.

By this means, a goodly number of men missed probable death either by drowning or

exposure to the cold, and, instead, landed safely aboard the destroyer, with nothing worse than a few bruises and scratches.

Among the last to descend was Ignace. Standing on deck, he watched man after man slide down to safety, thrilling with exultation. From the moment the men had begun to crowd the port rail, he had pinned his hopes upon the coming of a destroyer to the rescue. Since entering the danger zone, he had been wholly fascinated merely to watch these intrepid little fighters as they circled the fleet. He regarded them as super-craft, able to perform miracles.

Seeing disaster overtake the life boats, and men purposing to leap into the sea, he had forgotten all injunctions to be silent. His faith supreme in the wonder-working destroyers, he had shouted it out for all to hear. Nor had it surprised him when immediately afterward a destroyer had appeared.

He had been perfectly sure that it would. Neither was he aware of just how great a service he had unconsciously performed. What specially delighted him was the fact that his faith had not been misplaced.

When finally he took a slide into the object of his admiration, he landed almost at the feet of Schnitzel, who had preceded him only by a few moments. A joyful reunion took place between them. It was the first either had seen of any one of their bunkies.

"Where Jimmy, Bob, Roger? You see?" was Ignace's first breathless questions.

"Not since the alarm sounded." Schnitzel's tones were unsteady. "It's awful! We must try to find out if they're on this boat. If they're not——"

Schnitzel stopped, unable to go on.

"They no save, so wish I die, too," Ignace responded in a low, tense voice. Supreme tragedy looked out from his round, blue eyes.

"We'll hope they *are* aboard the destroyer." Schnitzel fully realized the Pole's suffering. "Let's start now to look for them. Their station was on the starboard side, but a lot of men came scrambling up from there to port, and dropped down into this boat. A lot of fellows would have jumped overboard when the boats capsized, if somebody hadn't sent up a yell not to jump. I don't know who started it. An officer, I guess."

"So-o." Ignace's strained features relaxed into the faint semblance of a smile. He knew who had "started it," but he did not say so.

While this brief talk went on between them, the destroyer, loaded to capacity, had moved away from the ship and headed for the not far distant Irish coast with her precious freight. It would be well after daybreak before she reached the nearest coast village, where she might land the rescued soldier boys.

An hour after Schnitzel and Ignace had taken

up the quest for their lost chums, they stumbled upon Roger Barlow.

The happiness of the meeting was short-lived, however. With Jimmy and Bob still missing, the faces of the three boys soon grew sad again. Together they took up the weary task of trying to obtain some trace of the lost ones, but without avail.

While the destroyer on the port side was busy loading up with soldier boys, the life boats on the starboard side had been launched with better success. Owing to the ship's heavy roll and the entanglement of the falls, it was slow work. By the time the last one had pulled away from the *Columbia,* the destroyer on the port side had shipped her cargo, and was making off with it.

The starboard rail was still lined with soldiers, waiting to be taken off by another destroyer, which had come up alongside the moment the way was clear. It was not more than half loaded, however, when a hoarse cry arose, "She's going down!"

Shouted warnings to the destroyer to "Stand clear! She's sinking!" left the rescuing vessel no choice. Half a loaf was better than no bread. It had either to pull away with its half load, or be sucked under by the sinking transport.

Hardly had the destroyer withdrawn to a safe distance when anxious eyes on board caught sight of flames rising amidships. A long cry of humans in distress was borne to their ears.

They saw the *Columbia* apparently break in two. Came a sinister, hissing sound, as the sea closed over her.

Then she disappeared beneath the waves.

CHAPTER XVI

WHAT HAPPENED TO JIMMY BLAISE

MEANWHILE, Jimmy Blaise had not gone aboard either of the rescuing destroyers, nor had he made his escape from the ill-fated transport to one of the life boats. He had felt his responsibility as sergeant too strongly to consider himself before others.

If worse came to worst, he decided that he would make a long dive overboard, and take his chances of being picked up by either a destroyer or one of the trawlers that had hastened to the scene at first warning of the disaster. With the arrival at starboard of a destroyer, rescue then seemed but a matter of moments. Jimmy was, in fact, getting ready to descend to it when the cry of "Stand Clear!" sent it scudding away from the listing ship.

Taking his one remaining chance, Jimmy went overboard in a clean, forceful dive that carried him well away from the wildly heaving vessel.

He came up like a cork and swam away from the *Columbia* for dear life, fearing lest he be sucked under as it went down. As it was, he just escaped. A few yards nearer and he must have been drawn into that wild swirl of water made by the vanishing transport.

Exhausted by the shock of striking the ice cold water and the desperate haste he had made to win clear of the *Columbia,* he floated briefly, then struck out again, swimming straight toward the twinkling lights of the trawler nearest to him. It seemed no great distance from him, though the blackness of the night and the sea prevented his being able to judge of that with any accuracy.

He was fairly sure that some one of the trawlers, if not this one, would before long come within hailing distance. By their moving lights, he thought that they must already be engaged in the work of picking up other men who had, like himself, leaped into the sea when that last cry of "Stand Clear!" had sounded.

The extreme coldness of the water warned him that he must lose no time in coming within hailing distance of one of these rescue boats. It was possible that he might keep afloat for a little while even without his life belt. Unfortunately for him, he had removed it just before going out on deck, it having been so nearly time for Taps.

Again, he might last only a short time. Over-

taken by complete numbness or a cramp, the end would come quickly.

Setting his teeth hard, to still their chattering, Jimmy rallied every ounce of energy within him to his aid, and swam with long, desperate strokes toward where the lights of the trawler twinkled in the darkness. It was his one chance for life.

When he had begun to make for it, it had appeared to be coming toward him. As he continued to swim toward it, it made a half turn, and winked away in another direction.

Raising himself a little out of the water, Jimmy sent a wild halloo across the inky sea. Almost instantly it was answered by someone on his right, only a few yards distant.

"Hello, there!" bawled out Jimmy. "Keep on yelling, and I'll come to you."

"Hel-l-o-o!" came the call. "Hel-lo-o!"

The voice continuing to call, Jimmy swam as fast as he could toward the sound.

Coming close to its owner, Jimmy could faintly discern the outlines of a figure clinging to something, which floated on the top of the water.

"Catch hold!" For a shipwrecked man, the voice, though hoarse, was marvelously calm. "It's a door. I captured it as it floated by me."

"You were lucky," panted Jimmy. His last, quick dash had tired him considerably. "We must be pretty close to where the *Columbia* went

down. I hope the fiends that torpedoed her will get theirs!"

"Do not tire yourself with talk." The voice became severely dictatorial. "Rest a moment. We will then shout together for help. Thus we shall sooner attract the attention of a trawler. *I* do not wish to drown."

In spite of their precarious situation, Jimmy briefly forgot his miseries to wonder what sort of man this was whom he had come upon in the dark. Apparently, this soldier's aim in hailing a comrade in distress had not been prompted by generous motives. He was merely looking for someone whom he might use to gain his own ends. His last remark showed utter indifference to everything except self-preservation.

The preciseness of his speech was quite unlike the usual forceful slang of the Sammy.

Jimmy was dismayed by the swift rush of repulsion for his fellow-sufferer, which swept over him. He found himself curiously robbed of his first feeling of comradely sympathy.

In silence, he clung to the piece of wreckage as it drifted slowly along. It was not the peremptory order not to talk which tied his tongue. It was his growing dislike for the unsympathetic castaway that reduced him to offended dumbness.

"Now we shall try it," announced the cold voice, after perhaps three minutes of silence had ensued between them. "I shall count three.

On three you must shout with me as loudly as you can. See you those lights? They are coming toward us."

"Count, then," was Jimmy's laconic answer.

"One, two, three!" counted the voice deliberately.

A concerted shout went up from two throats; again and again it was repeated.

Of a sudden a white glare of light smote the darkness. It fell directly upon the bobbing door, briefly blinding the two who clung to it. Their cries had been heard on board the trawler, and a searchlight was scouring the blackness in an endeavor to locate the castaways. Simultaneous with the light, a voice boomed through a megaphone, ordering them to hold fast and keep on yelling.

Astounded by the revelation of that sudden flood of light, Jimmy did not instantly respond to the order to yell. In his companion of the dark, he had recognized one of the soldier wireless operators, formerly on the ill-starred *Columbia*. A second's amazement and he recovered sufficiently to bawl an answer to the hail.

Evident recognition of Blaise on the part of the wireless man was attended by something more than mere amazement. As the light shifted a trifle from them, Jimmy heard the hissing exclamation:

"*Schwein!* Go where you sent my father!"

A murderous fist dealt him a savage blow, in-

tended to wrench his hands from the door, and send him down to death.

Clinging with the left hand to the door, the would-be murderer's treacherous right arm lacked sufficient force to accomplish his design. Reeling back, Jimmy's one hand left the door, but the other clung to it. Followed for him a moment of blessed darkness, during which two more blows of that vengeful arm providentially missed him, and struck the piece of wreckage.

Only slightly feazed by the attack, Jimmy had no intention of going to the bottom. Recovered in that brief interval of darkness, he let go the door, preferring to trust himself to the sea. It could hardly be more merciless than the man who had just missed finishing him.

Striking out for the trawler, which was drawing nearer, he swam for a few yards, then, raising himself up, let out a long, echoing yell. At his rear he heard another cry go up. It became evident to him that the man who had attacked him did not purpose to be left behind. Jimmy did not doubt that once they were both hauled aboard the trawler, the fellow would deny all acquaintance with himself.

Yet out there in the dark, the young sergeant had learned something. The wireless operator spoke German. Moreover, he had accused Jimmy of that which could mean but one thing. Worn out by that battle against the waves, his brain had never worked more clearly. As he

rallied his fast-flickering strength to keep up just a little longer, the pieces of the puzzle fitted themselves together in his mind. This then was the solution.

The wireless operator was a German, the son of the pseudo-stoker, alias the man under the bridge.

They had worked together since the beginning of the voyage, and before that, no doubt, to bring about the destruction of the *Columbia*. They had failed once. Perhaps to-night's crime lay at their door. Now knowing them for what they were, Jimmy believed that this might be, indeed, true.

With court-martial and death awaiting the father on landing in England, the son had a double object in wreaking speedy vengeance. Beside it the preservation of their own lives sank into insignificance. The foul deed done, Jimmy could now readily understand the son's renewed desire to live to work havoc another day.

All this passed like lightning through his brain. He was suddenly seized with a curious desire to laugh. How funny, he thought, that he should be able to reason out such a thing when half-drowned!

How his head ached! What was the matter with him anyway? His legs and arms had somehow stopped moving and he couldn't make them go. He heard a voice shouting to him

and tried to answer. A light suddenly flared into his eyes.

With a last quavering cry, Jimmy threw up his arms and knew no more.

CHAPTER XVII

"MAN OVERBOARD!"

WHEN Jimmy Blaise finally opened his eyes it was on board the trawler and surrounded by a group of anxious-eyed men who had almost given up all hope of bringing him back to life. Numbed by exposure to the icy water, the cowardly blow he received had done much to hasten his final collapse.

Had he not been picked up by a boat from the trawler immediately afterward all would have been over with Sergeant Jimmy.

Directly after he had been hauled into the trawler's boat, the traitorous wireless man had also been rescued, clinging stolidly to his door and in far better shape than was the victim of his malice. All this was, however, lost on the unconscious sergeant.

Jimmy's first essay at coming back to the world was brief. His eyes closed again immediately and with a faint sigh he sank again into oblivion. Nor did he reach a stage of active

consciousness for some time afterward. Then he found himself lying on a cot within the four white walls of a tiny stateroom, wrapped in blankets and perspiring profusely.

His first anxious inquiries as to where he was and what had happened to him elicited small information from the solemn English sailor in attendance. He learned, however, that it was eight o'clock in the morning and that he was "all right" and had better keep quiet.

This did not deter the invincible Jimmy from trying to figure out his own situation. Memory beginning to return, it was not very long afterward until the eventful happenings of the previous night began flocking back to his mind in a steady procession.

"Oh, see here. You can't keep a good man down," he protested to the sailor soon after his awakening to a knowledge of where he was and what had occurred.

That stolid-faced Britisher had just appeared in the stateroom with a steaming bowl of broth.

"I want my clothes. That is what's left of 'em," he added with a faint grin. "This cot's a regular hot box. I'm all O. K. If you don't believe it just watch me."

To prove it he calmly sat up and swung his legs over the side of the cot with an energy that fully backed up his assertion.

"My horders his to keep you in bed," was

the dampening response. "Heat your soup hand be glad you're 'ere to heat it."

With this the man took himself off. A little later the appearance of a medical man to see the patient brought a burst of fresh energy and expostulation from Jimmy which appeared to convince the ship's doctor that there was no sham about the young sergeant's rapid recovery.

Clothed in an array of misfit garments from the ship's stores, Jimmy was allowed to go on deck. It was then that the glad sight of land, not far off, met his eyes. The trawler was putting in briskly for a small town on the Irish coast, approaching it with a speed that meant business.

Jimmy did not know it to be the Irish coast. It did not take him long to find that out, however. The rapidity with which the trawler was nearing it made him realize that he had work to do which could not be put off.

"Where can I find the captain of this ship?" he presently questioned one of the crew.

"He's in his cabin now. Just saw him come off the bridge."

Informed as to the location of the captain's cabin, Jimmy set off post haste to find it.

Owing to his sympathy for the sufferers in the recent disaster, the captain, a fine, upstanding man of about forty-five, readily granted Jimmy an interview.

"Well, my man," he greeted as Jimmy entered, "you and your comrades on board our boat had a close call last night. I'm afraid many a brave lad went under the waves. We cruised around where the *Columbia* went down until almost daybreak." The captain sighed. Motioning Jimmy to a chair he regarded the young sergeant in kindly fashion. "What can I do for you?" he asked.

"Nothing for me now, sir. Everything that could be done has already been done. I owe my life to your men. They picked me up just as I was going down. I've certainly received fine treatment, all around."

Jimmy's boyish face glowed with the gratitude he felt toward the kindly men who had done so much for him.

"I wanted to see you about a man who was in the water near me when I went to pieces," he continued. "I don't know whether he was picked up or not. If he is on board this boat then you are carrying a traitor. He is enlisted in the National Army of the United States, but he is a German who is working for Germany."

"What!" The captain half started from his chair. Dropping back again he asked sharply: "Do you realize the nature of the accusation you have just made?"

"Yes, sir." Jimmy drew himself up a trifle proudly. "I know what I am talking about. I wouldn't make such an accusation lightly.

It's rather a long story but I'll tell it in as few words as I can."

"A very strange and terrible story," was the captain's grim opinion when Jimmy had ended.

"It's true, sir, every word of it."

Jimmy was not quite sure from the officer's tone how credulously his narrative had been received.

"I am Sergeant Blaise of the 509th Infantry. Part of what I have told you is already known to two commanding officers of the United States Army, Major Stearns of Camp Sterling and Major Warren of Camp Marvin. I think my word will hold against anything this fellow may try to say."

"I don't doubt it, my man," was the reassuring response. "I'm quite ready to believe it. The Central Powers have willing hands and eyes at work in the last places where one might expect to find them. Since I've been on duty on the North Sea——"

The captain broke off abruptly, his face growing dark.

"Well, never mind that now," he continued. "I saw you being brought on board last night. You were in the second boat. Another man was picked up at the same time. I didn't pay much attention to him as he came over the side except to notice that he was able to walk a little when he was set down on deck. He may be the man we want.

"I'll send for the second officer and find out all about the fellow. I'll have him brought here for you to identify. You had better stay here until then. On a boat of this size it won't take long to get hold of him."

Despatching a man for the second officer on the trawler, the captain asked the young sergeant a number of questions regarding his enlistment in the Army, and of the period he had spent in training to go over.

The appearance of the second officer briefly interrupted the chat. He informed the captain that he had lately seen the man in question on deck; he knew nothing about him other than he was a Sammy off the lost *Columbia*. With this scanty information he left the room, with the order to go in search of the rescued man and bring him directly before the captain.

During the interval of waiting, Jimmy ventured to inquire if many Sammies had been picked up by the trawler. In his short walk to the captain's cabin he had seen only a few, all being strangers to himself. Presently he found himself telling the officer of his bunkies and his anxiety for their safety.

"I believe we picked up not more than twenty-five or thirty men," the captain said. "Give me the names of your friends. I'll have inquiry made about them at once. The two destroyers accounted for several hundred Sammies. Your chums may have been on one or

the other of them. If so, they're safe. You may not see them for a while, though. I suppose the survivors will be scattered in hospitals and private homes for some miles along the Irish coast."

Jimmy felt his eyes blur. He winked hard.

"I won't allow myself to think the boys went down. Someone will have to show me before I'll believe it," he declared with a brave attempt at cheerfulness.

"That is the proper spirit, my boy."

The captain had used the words "my boy" quite unconsciously. In the fine, sensitive face of the young sergeant he read much that pleased him.

"Before this war is fought to a finish," he said, "we shall have need of every atom of faith we can——"

The entrance into the cabin of two men checked his remark. One was the second officer, the other the wireless operator.

The latter, walking a trifle ahead of the officer, took one silent look at the two occupants of the cabin. Like a flash he thrust his astounded conductor savagely aside and bolted.

Forgetting himself, Jimmy uttered a loud cry and dashed after the fugitive. Outside the cabin he lost the runner for an instant. Then he saw him racing across the deck to the railing.

Before the few men on deck could grasp the

situation in time to stop that mad flight, the traitor had mounted the rail and leaped far out into the sea.

"Man overboard!"

It was Jimmy who sent up the stentorian shout. Leaning far out over the rail he saw a head, crowned with heavy black hair, bob briefly among the waves.

By the time a boat had been lowered it was seen no more. The wind had risen toward daybreak and a fairly heavy sea was running.

Strangely enough it was boat Number Two that went to the search. Its crew had instantly set the "crazy Sammy" down as a man whose reason had toppled under the strain of the recent disaster.

Thus, they construed that wild plunge into the sea as the act of a madman. Standing at the rail Jimmy Blaise had seen a traitor go down to the self-same death he had helped to mete out to the soldier boys on the *Columbia*.

CHAPTER XVIII

REAL AMERICANS

"A FITTING end for a traitor."

Still at the rail, Jimmy turned at sound of the voice to find the captain of the trawler at his side.

"He cannot live long in this sea," the officer continued grimly. "A good loss. The dog saved a firing squad the trouble of an early morning hike. I wish a few more like him would follow his example. I'd like to put that in the report of this affair that I shall make to the British Government."

"I wouldn't mind being one of a firing squad, sir, with such a target to shoot at."

"You only say that." The captain smiled. "If the time ever comes when you're chosen for that duty, you'll think differently. It's not a pleasant job, no matter who the target may be."

"I shouldn't have said that, sir." Jimmy

flushed. "I was thinking of my bunkies and it made me feel blood-thirsty."

"We shall soon be in now. Half an hour's run and we'll anchor over there," the captain assured. "This fellow's jump overboard has delayed us considerably. I'm going to have Number Two recalled at once. We have puttered here long enough."

About to turn away, he stopped.

"Sergeant," he said, "I may not see you again. I'm glad to have met you. You're a brave lad and a true soldier. I shall always remember you. Here's wishing you the best of luck and the hope that you'll find your bunkies."

"I am glad to have met *you,* sir." Jimmy's hand went out to meet the captain's proffered hand. "I hope every British officer I meet will be like you."

"Tut, tut! I'm only one of the King's small-fry defenders. You'll meet the big ones 'over there.' You'll find they can tell a good man when they see one, too."

With a chuckle the kindly captain walked away, nor did he and Jimmy ever meet again. Yet each had a pleasant memory to treasure of that brief acquaintance.

Ashore at last in the quaint Irish village, Jimmy and the little company of Sammies rescued by the trawler found a welcome waiting for them at the hands of the warm-heatred in-

habitants. Thanks to his leather money-belt which he had worn next to the skin since the beginning of that ill-fated voyage, Jimmy at least was not "broke."

It soon developed that he was the only one in the crowd who had any money worth mentioning. The men cared for by the trawler had all been taken from the water. The majority in a half-clothed condition. The sea had played havoc with their clothing, though the trawler's boats had picked them up shortly after they had landed in the water. In consequence none save Jimmy had suffered long exposure to the cold.

All of the party save himself were privates. It therefore became his duty as a non-com to look out for them. The warm hospitality of the simple Irish folk left him nothing to offer his comrades except his money. This he promptly divided among them. Inquiring their names he jotted them down, then requested them to line up while he called the roll.

Following roll call the stranded Khaki Boys separated briefly to eat a second breakfast in a dozen different cottages. All being anxious to get in touch with their own military units, Jimmy ordered them to repair to the railway station at a given hour. He intended in the meantime to make diligent inquiry relative to the best course to be pursued.

Not knowing the destination of the two de-

stroyers which had cared for the majority of the survivors, the captain of the trawler had headed at daylight for the nearest landing with his picked-up human freight. He had calculated that the destroyers might put in at this point. Arrived there, however, it was learned that they had landed their cargoes of stranded Sammies at another town about twelve miles distant.

Jimmy's first move after separating from his men was to locate the railway station. Informed that no train would leave there for several hours, he went for a brief stroll about the pretty little village. On every side he met with extreme kindness.

He returned to the station in time to witness the arrival of an odd-looking little train. It reminded him of toy trains he had owned as playthings when a child.

"Are you from off the *Columbia?*" inquired a crisp voice at his elbow.

Jimmy wheeled with a start. His attention on the funny-looking engine up ahead, he was taking small notice of the few passengers issuing from the queer little coaches.

"Yes, sir; about thirty men besides myself were landed here this morning by a trawler," he made courteous answer.

Jimmy at once identified his questioner as a Red Cross man. With him was another man, also wearing the Red Cross service uniform.

They were clean-cut, alert-looking Englishmen. He judged neither to be over thirty years of age.

"Where are these men you mention?" came the quick question.

Jimmy smiled.

"About half of the village invited them to breakfast, and they've accepted, sir. I expect them back by twelve o'clock. I understand that a lot of the *Columbia's* men who were taken off her by the destroyers were put ashore not many miles from here at L——. We hope to join them there this afternoon. We are anxious to get in touch with our units."

"Yes. L—— is running over with shipwrecked Sammies. We were sent there from Belfast and from L—— here. Our men are being rushed to ports all along this part of the coast to look after the Americans."

"Do you know whether many men were lost?" Jimmy inquired anxiously.

"Only a small percentage, I trust," reassured the Red Cross man. "It is impossible to speak definitely yet, however. The survivors will be sent to a rest camp in England. Until they are assembled in camp and the lists checked there will be more or less doubt regarding how many were lost."

"I'm mightily worried about four of my chums," sighed Jimmy. "Haven't seen a sign or heard a thing of them since I left them just

before Taps. I was on deck when the crash came."

"A terrible business all around! I hope you will have the luck to find your chums at L——."

"Are you an officer?" inquired the other relief man.

"Not a commissioned officer, sir. I am Sergeant Blaise, 509th Infantry."

"I am Lieutenant Edwards of the Red Cross. This is Lieutenant Griswold, also of the R. C."

Both men extended cordial hands which Jimmy shook in turn, expressing his pleasure in the meeting.

"In what condition are your men, Sergeant?" asked Lieutenant Edwards.

"Not one of them ill or injured, sir. I am a fair sample of the way the others are dressed. All of the men have reefers or oilskin jackets like this. We lost everything except the clothes we were wearing when the ship was hit. The water spoiled them. Some of the men didn't have much on to spoil, though. The trawler's men fitted us out with enough clothing to keep us warm."

"What about money?"

"We each have enough to take us to L——. None of us are flat broke," Jimmy hastily responded.

"Someone must have played fairy godmother, then."

Lieutenant Edwards shrewdly eyed the young sergeant.

"One of the men saved his money belt, sir. He—he staked the—the others," was Jimmy's somewhat lame explanation.

"I see." The lieutenant's eye-brows lifted. "It strikes me, Sergeant, that you've looked after your men pretty thoroughly."

"There was no one else to do it, sir. I happened to be the only one in the crowd above the rank of private. I couldn't do very much for them, though."

"You have evidently done your level best," was Lieutenant Griswold's crisp commendation. "As your men are all in good condition and fairly clothed against the cold, your plan to take the next train for L—— is wise. We will accompany you, provided nothing special intervenes to prevent our doing so. It depends on what we find to do at the water front. At L—— you will all receive new outfits and be made as comfortable as possible."

"Suppose we go into the station," suggested Lieutenant Edwards. "The wind is a little too searching for comfort. We Red Cross men are keen on comfort, don't you know," he added with satirical humor.

"I should say it was just the opposite," retorted Jimmy neatly. "A Sammy has an easy berth compared to an R. C. worker. I wish I could tell you how much we men think of the

Red Cross, but there aren't any words big enough to express it."

"We try to do our bit while we last," Lieutenant Edwards responded gravely. "Once we get behind the lines, some of us don't last long," he added, his jaws setting grimly. "Shelling hospitals and ambulance trains is a favorite outdoor sport with the Boches."

Repairing into the station the three men seated themselves on a rude wooden bench and continued to chat. As it was nearly the hour of noon, the two Red Cross workers had declared their intention of remaining at the station until Jimmy's men returned. They wished to look them over, then make a trip to the water front for the purpose of learning whether any other injured or dead soldiers had been picked up in that vicinity. If none such had been found, they would then go back to L—— with Jimmy and his men.

Promptly at twelve o'clock every man reported at the station. Jimmy then ordered line-up on the platform and again called the roll. He announced the time that their train would leave for L—— and ordered them to remain within a few yards of the station until it arrived.

This done he turned them over to the Red Cross men. Lieutenant Edwards then addressed the little band, expressing his sympathy for their misfortune. Commending them

for their apparent cheerfulness under such trying circumstances, he promised them new outfits as soon as they should reach L——.

"Three cheers for the Red Cross!" yelled one appreciative Sammy as the captain concluded his speech.

They were given with a will that brought smiles to the faces of the two officers and a volley of acclamation from the crowd of villagers who had followed the returning men to the station. To these simple Irish folk it was an eventful occasion.

"Three cheers for the Irish!" proposed another irrepressible Sammy at the top of his voice.

The soldier boys responded with fervor. Not one of them had returned to the station empty-handed. Their warm-hearted hosts and hostesses had loaded them down with all sorts of eatables and small, serviceable gifts.

"Splendid fellows!" eulogized Lieutenant Griswold. "No flunkies in that crowd!"

Jimmy's gray eyes lighted with happy pride at this warm appreciation of his comrades. They had indeed shown themselves worthy to bear the name of Americans.

CHAPTER XIX

FATE'S SORRY TRICK

"IF you have a good man you can leave in charge, Blaise, why not go down to the water front with us?" invited Lieutenant Edwards.

The wind grown steadily keener, the Khaki Boys had now trooped inside the station, preferring to remain in shelter until train time.

"I don't know any of them very well, sir, but I do know that they've all behaved like bricks. I guess they can be trusted to take care of themselves. I'd like to go with you."

"Put them on honor and come along," suggested Lieutenant Griswold.

"I believe I will, sir. Just a moment."

Walking to the center of the waiting-room Jimmy called out, "Attention!" Instantly every man responded in alert, snappy fashion.

"Men," he began, "I'm going to leave for a little while. I'll be back long before train time. You're on your own until then. Don't go

far from the station and be right here to answer to your names at roll-call before we leave for L——. That's all."

That was not "all."

"What's the matter with the Sarge?" shouted a man.

"*He's all right!*" roared a lusty chorus.

"Three cheers for the Sarge!" yelled a second soldier.

Another noisy ovation echoed through the room.

Jimmy laughed and ducked his head in what Bob had always termed "kid fashion."

"Much obliged, boys," he nodded. He longed to add, "I'm not so much," but dignity forbade the utterance. Instead he beamed his good will on his little flock. Leaving them on their own he started out with his genial companions.

It was not a long hike from the station to the water front. Walking beside the two trim officers, Jimmy was of the private opinion that "they had their nerve" to be seen with such a "scarecrow" as himself. He marveled that they had invited him to "go along."

At the water front, an irregular line of beach curved sufficiently so as to form a little natural harbor. Lying at anchor in it were a number of small boats of various kinds. The water being fairly deep, none of them were anchored very far from shore. Farther up the bay a

long, queer-looking pier extended for some distance into the water.

Coming within sight of it Lieutenant Griswold exclaimed:

"Look! Something's going on out there!"

Jimmy gave an involuntary shudder as his eyes followed the lieutenant's indexing finger. Almost at the end of the pier a number of natives had gathered, their attention fixed upon something below in the water.

From where the three men stood, they could observe a dinghy, well under the pier and between its piles. In the boat were two men. One was rowing it. The other leaned out of it, a grappling hook in one hand.

"A body washed in under the pier, I'm afraid," was Lieutenant Edwards' grave conjecture. "The tide's coming in fast. If it's one of the *Columbia's* boys he's past all reach of any help we could give him."

"Come. We'd best go nearer and find out. That's part of the work we came here to do," sighed Lieutenant Griswold.

Jimmy's heart sank as he hurried out onto the pier with the two relief men. If the body of a soldier victim had floated in under the pier, dared he look at it? Suppose it might prove to be the lifeless form of one of his bunkies?

"What's the matter here?" briskly rapped out Lieutenant Edwards as the trio forged into the midst of the group of natives.

Sight of the two Red Cross men elicited instant and respectful reply.

"Another poor broth of a lad, sohr," quavered an old man. "Shure the sea braught him foreninst the pare, but they do be sayin' he's no souljer."

A shout from below informed those on the pier that the men in the boat had secured their lifeless catch. A few breathless moments, and the curious watchers saw the boat slip out from between the piles and into the open water. In the bottom of the dinghy and behind the rower's seat, lay a dark dripping heap.

Jimmy took one look and covered his eyes. That single glimpse had revealed a flash of white face and black hair which his tortured imagination conjured to belong to Bob. A few moments before he had felt that he could not bear to risk making such a horrible discovery.

Now he felt that he must know positively whether or not the drowned man was Bob. The old native's quavering statement that the dark heap in the boat was not the body of a soldier carried no weight.

He was, therefore, at the head of the little throng that trooped back over the pier as the boatman pulled for shore. Down to the beach he dashed, the first person to greet the dinghy as it shoved its prow into the sand.

Almost at his heels ran the Red Cross men.

"Let me see his face," Jimmy cried out

hoarsely. He hardly recognized his own voice as its anxious croaking echoed in his ears.

Out of respect for the dead, one of the boatmen had covered the gruesome heap with a piece of coarse canvas.

"Do ye whait an' ye shull see," returned the oarsman placidly as he lifted the oars from the tholes and sprang ashore.

His companion already out of the dinghy, the two dragged it further up onto the sand.

"Luke ye," conceded the oarsman gruffly as he pulled away the concealing canvas.

Jimmy mentally braced himself and looked. Relief, amazement, loathing mingled within him as he stared at that set, waxen face.

"Not Bob. Thank God, not Bob! Only a yellow traitor," he muttered.

"What's that?" queried Lieutenant Edwards sharply, flashing a peculiar glance at Jimmy. The agreeable young sergeant was behaving rather strangely, he thought. Blaise appeared to be a trifle irrational.

"I said 'only a yellow traitor.'"

Jimmy repeated it in an undertone, but with unmistakable finality. He had pronounced his eulogy over the dead and he meant it.

"Please don't ask me what I mean now, sir," he added. "I'd rather not explain here. All I can say for the present is, that though this man once wore the uniform of the United States Army he was a traitor to it. He was on board

the *Columbia* when she went down, but he doesn't deserve decent burial."

"If he was on board the *Columbia* then we are bound to look after the body," returned the lieutenant curtly. He had begun to wonder if Blaise was quite in his right mind.

"I'm willing to do all I can to help *you,* sir."

Jimmy emphasized the "you." The steady light in his gray eyes as they sought the lieutenant's, made the latter feel slightly ashamed of his half-formed doubt of the sergant's sanity. Blaise appeared to understand the situation, even if he himself didn't.

Wheeling, he ordered the crowd that pressed about the boat to fall back. He next addressed a volley of terse questions to the boatmen. The queries ended in orders that sent them both hustling off up the beach in search of a litter while he and his two companions stood guard over the dinghy's fell contents.

Soon afterward a rude canvas-covered litter was borne away from the beach by four natives. They were taking it to the village morgue. Directly behind it walked Jimmy and the Red Cross men and behind them streamed the crowd.

The hint of a scornful smile flickered and died on Jimmy's lips as he strode grimly along. Here he was, trailing solemnly along behind the body of not only his would-be murderer, but the real murderer of many gallant Khaki

Boys. His bunkies among them, perhaps. He experienced a wild desire to shout, "Traitor! Murderer!" at the top of his voice. Fate had indeed played him a sorry trick.

CHAPTER XX

ON THE WAY TO L——

"I CAN'T say that I am sorry to see the last of this village," sighed Jimmy Blaise, as the "toy train" began to move slowly away from the station of the quaint Irish dot of a town. "That may sound very ungrateful after the bully way we fellows have been treated by the folks here. Can't help it. It's the way I feel about it, just the same."

Occupying a compartment with the two Red Cross men, Jimmy's gray eyes showed unmistakable relief as from a window they watched the village gradually disappear from view. He was indeed thankful that his little detachment and himself were at last started for L——.

"I can't blame you, Blaise." Lieutenant Edwards' tones conveyed friendly sympathy. "That trip to the water front must have been very unpleasant for you, don't you know."

On the way to the station from the village morgue Jimmy had narrated to the two relief

men what seemed to them a most remarkable story. Listening to it, all that had a little earlier appeared peculiar in Jimmy's conduct they now saw as having been merely natural under the circumstances.

Having found much in common from the first it was not surprising that Lieutenant Griswold had interrupted Jimmy at the beginning of his story with:

"Why not drop the 'sir,' Blaise? It's hardly important among ourselves, don't you know. It's really no end of a beastly nuisance among friends. What?"

Now settled in the compartment for the short ride to L—— Jimmy's whole mind was set on reaching there to begin instant search for his lost bunkies.

"I hope I find my chums in L——, or at least hear news that they're safe," he said wistfully. "If our K. O. is there, he'll tell me all there is to know about my bunkies. I'm going to try to get a chance to see him, first of all, to tell him about this affair at the water front."

"Yes, that will be your best plan. You ought to make a full report to him concerning this wireless fellow," counseled Lieutenant Edwards. "He will no doubt get in touch with the British Intelligence Office, directly he has heard your story. Some of their men are at L——, I presume. If so, one or more of them may be sent down to the village to see if he or

they can identify the body as that of a man whom the British Government are after."

"I hardly fancy this Boche was a marked man," disagreed Lieutenant Griswold. "He looked too young to have been a notorious spy. More likely that his father was a real menace to the Allies."

"This Charles Black, as he called himself, *was* an unusual man," declared Jimmy. "He had the strength of a giant. He was well educated, clever, daring and merciless. I say 'was' because I keep hoping that he went down with the *Columbia*. The guard may not have been able to get to him."

"It would be the first duty of the corporal of the guard to look after his prisoner," asserted Lieutenant Griswold. "He undoubtedly would do so unless an accident overtook him at the start of the disaster."

"The fellow must have known what had happened as soon as the crash came. Probably he was sure that his son would try to finish what he'd started," was Jimmy's opinion. "If the guard didn't pay any attention to him, he'd make a hard struggle to get out of the jug and go overboard. He'd hardly expect to be rescued by the Boches. They wouldn't dare try to get at him, even if they knew he was a prisoner on board. They might have known it on account of his son being on wireless duty. Very likely it wouldn't worry 'em."

"Was the man ironed in clink?" inquired Lieutenant Griswold.

"I don't know." Jimmy shook his head. "I saw him only once after I clinched with him at the top of the stairs."

"That was at headquarters, naturally."

"Yes. The K. O. sent for me the day after the first submarine scare. He wanted me to take a good look at the prisoner, to see if I were sure that he was the bridge man.

"The guard brought him before the K. O. The fellow had the bracelets on then, all right enough. He might not have been made to wear them in the jug," Jimmy went on reflectively. "Without them he'd stand a chance to live in the water for hours. He was a husky brute and I don't doubt he could swim like a fish."

"Ten chances to one he never left clink. I daresay he was drowned," judged Lieutenant Edwards.

"Let us hope he was," shrugged his fellow worker.

"I'd rather think of him as canned for good," confessed Jimmy. "I've mixed it up twice with him and that'll hold me for a while. I'm no quitter, but I'm no Samson, either."

Both Englishmen smiled openly at this slangy confession. The American sergeant was very amusing, they thought. They liked his sturdy frankness and ingenuous ways. Jimmy in turn was equally entertained by certain words and

phrases they continually used which he guessed to be peculiar to an Englishman.

"Anyway I count myself lucky to have met *you* and Lieutenant Edwards," Jimmy added, his eyes roving from one to the other of his new friends. "I hope to goodness I see you both again."

"Haven't the least doubt but that you will, Blaise," assured Lieutenant Edwards. "Any day we are quite likely to be ordered to a Red Cross station behind the lines. We wouldn't mind going back to the front again. We have rather missed the sound of the big guns since we came away from the fighting. We shall be jolly well pleased to meet you again, too. We have found the Sammies really delightful. Sorry our time with you is growing so short. This stop we are about to make is the last before we reach L——."

"Ah, here we have our usual crowd of villagers," observed Lieutenant Griswold, peering from a window of the compartment.

The train had now come to a full stop at one of the numerous tiny hamlets along the road to L——.

"How did these people find out when we were coming?" Jimmy questioned his affable companions.

Lieutenant Edwards laughed.

"Oh, I don't doubt they have been waiting at these little stations ever since daybreak," he

said. "News travels fast and these folk are keen on seeing you Sammies. They regard the Americans as wonderful curiosities. You must realize that compared with your great country, Ireland is a tiny dot on the map. You can almost shout the news from village to village."

"Have you ever been in America?" Jimmy inquired eagerly. "If you haven't I hope you'll both come over and visit me when this war ends."

"My dear Blaise we should be delighted, provided we don't take a journey 'West' before that time by the shell route," accepted Lieutenant Griswold, smiling at Jimmy's long leap into the future. "We have never visited America. We both hope to do so if we live until Germany is brought to her knees."

"She sure will be," was Jimmy's sturdy prediction. "I've made up my mind to hang around until that day comes. I have a hunch that I won't go West. I'm going to see the finish and go home to America afterward. I feel it in my bones. Maybe I won't be proud of myself then! My chest will certainly expand whenever I think about how I did my bit to help win the big war."

"Such confidence should win you a safe passport through the trenches," declared Lieutenant Griswold, amused yet somewhat impressed by Jimmy's "hunch." "I wish you luck, Blaise."

"Well, rather," chimed in his companion. "It's just possible we may see you again at L——. It depends, of course, on how long the Sammies remain there and on what is waiting for us at our station. We may be sent somewhere else directly."

"I have already telegraphed Captain Woodleigh at our station regarding your little detachment," informed Lieutenant Griswold. "He has in turn apprised the officer in command of your comrades at L——. A detail of soldiers will meet you at the station and escort you to headquarters. Once there you will be assigned to temporary quarters. In some private residence, I daresay. I imagine you won't remain long in L——."

"'Where do we go from here'—there, I mean?" quoted Jimmy, smiling.

"To Belfast, I believe, and from there to England to a rest camp," surmised Lieutenant Edwards. "Directly you Sammies have new uniforms and equipment issued to you you will be started on across the channel to *la belle France.*"

"We can't go too soon to suit me," was Jimmy's valiant reply. "If I find my bunkies safe and sound, then the five of us will want to get there in a hurry to help the Allies win the war and put a stop to the fiendish U-boats. If I have to go alone, then——" Jimmy drew a sharp breath. "I'll have double cause to hate

the Boches. All that one man can do to avenge the murder of four of the best fellows that ever drew breath will be done by Jimmy Blaise as long as he's a leg left to stand on and a whole hand to pull a trigger!"

CHAPTER XXI

A K. O. WORTH HAVING

"OH, Blaise, there is your escort!" exclaimed Lieutenant Griswold as the train came to a stop in front of the station platform at L——.

"Sure enough! Those fellows——"

Jimmy's reply ended in a ringing whoop of joy. Leaping to his feet he made a furious onslaught on the door of the compartment. It was locked, of course, a fact which he had forgotten.

"It's Barlow, one of my bunkies!" he fairly shouted at his companions as he continued to shake the prisoning door. "He's out there on the platform! Where the dickens is that guard? Why doesn't he come and open this confounded door?"

"Easy there, my boy," counseled Lieutenant Edwards.

The guard opening the door with a jerk, Jimmy paused only to call over one shoulder,

"See you both on the platform. Wait for me!"

With this he made a flying leap from the open door of the compartment and bounded over to a familiar figure, clad in an olive-drab uniform.

"Rodge!" he yelled and made a dive for his lost bunkie, both arms extended.

"Oh, Jimmy! Jimmy Blazes!"

Roger grabbed Jimmy and actually hugged him. A second and the two were gripping hands with a force that told of the strain each had endured. A momentary mist had risen to both pairs of eyes.

"You good old scout! I was afraid I'd never see you again!"

Jimmy looked utter affection.

"We—we—couldn't—bear—to think——"

"*We?*" Jimmy cried out in joyful question. "Are the fellows safe?"

"Every last one of us is accounted for now," Roger rejoiced. "You were the only one missing from the big Five and now you've come back to it!"

"Thank God, we are all safe!" Jimmy said reverently. "I wish I could make that mean every last man that was on the *Columbia*—except two," he added savagely.

"Except two?" Roger repeated in questioning wonder.

"Yes, that's what I mean. You know who one of them is or was. Hope it's 'was.' But

never mind that now. Let's wait until we're all together again. Then Blazes will spill the beans. There's more than a bushel to spill, too. Oh, you Rodge, but I'm glad to see you! Shake hands again and give me a good hard old grip. Then I'll know I'm not seeing a ghost!"

"Oh, I'm real enough," laughed Roger. "I wish I could say the same of all the good fellows who shipped with us."

His blue eyes darkened with the pain of memory. His lips lost their smiling curve.

"Tough luck!" Jimmy's pet expression of sympathy fully conveyed the emotion he felt. "It's hard to realize that we five really came out alive. It's too good to be true!"

"But it *is* true," emphasized Roger joyfully. "Oh, won't there be a jubilee when I lead you up to the gang! We thought we'd—lost—you —for good, Blazes!"

"Gee, Rodge, I guess we've all had about as much as we could stand and not go dippy. I didn't dare let myself think—— Well, you know."

Jimmy's gray eyes looked unutterable things. "But it's all right now. It's *all right!* Whoops, baby!"

His voice rising on every word he ended with a jubilant shout of rejoicing that warmed Roger's heart. It certainly was "great" to have rollicking, high-spirited Blazes back again.

"Glad to see you so jolly well pleased, Blaise."

The remark came from Lieutenant Edwards. He and Lieutenant Griswold had come up to bid the young sergeant good-bye.

"Thank you, Lieutenant. Roger, meet my friends Lieutenant Griswold and Lieutenant Edwards of the Red Cross. My bunkie, Corporal Barlow," introduced Jimmy.

Wondering a little at Jimmy's easy air of familiarity with the two Red Cross officers, Roger saluted them smartly. To his surprise both offered their hands.

"Any friend of Sergeant Blaise, don't you know, we are delighted to shake hands with," Lieutenant Edwards declared warmly. "Sorry we can't stop longer. We must be on our way. I trust you will both land safely in France and that all will go well with you afterward."

"My best wishes to you both," said Lieutenant Griswold heartily. "Here are our cards, Blaise. If ever you wish to communicate with either of us a letter to this address will eventually reach us. Don't hesitate to call on us if we can be of service to you. We shall be only too glad to respond."

"It's mighty kind in you." Jimmy's face broke into the radiant smile that always won him friends. "I'd like to say the same to you for myself, Sergeant Blaise, 509th Infantry,

will be about all the address I'll ever have over here, I guess. I shall hope to hear from both of you."

With a few added words of pleasant farewell the two Red Cross men walked away, leaving Jimmy and Roger to themselves.

By this time the first rush of greetings was over between the men of Jimmy's detachment and the men of the escort sent to meet them. The crowd of civilians on the platform were now taking their turn at greeting the newly arrived survivors.

"We'd better be moving," was presently Roger's opinion. "I'm in command of this escort detail. I'm to take you fellows over to headquarters. The K. O. and his staff are quartered in a big house about half a mile from here. The fellows are scattered far and wide through the town. Almost every family has a few Khaki Boys for pets. We are pets, all right enough. These folks can't do enough for us. They are the most hospitable bunch you ever met in your life."

"Where's our crowd?" Jimmy questioned eagerly.

"Oh, we've a fine billet! We've quartered at the cottage of the nicest old lady you ever saw. Just the four of us. I told our hostess about you and she's saving a place for you. Her name is Mrs. O'Rourke and she said: "Sure and it's Margaret O'Rourke and no other

who'll be savin' a place for yer lost friend. May the blessed saints presarve him!' "

Jimmy grinned broadly at this.

"It's the salty salt water that came near presarvin' yours truly," he said. "It pickled my uniform and almost pickled me. These clothes I'm wearing are some *duds*. I ought not to complain. They kept me warm."

"You look spick and span." Jimmy eyed Roger enviously. "How'd you get a U. S. uniform so soon? Lieutenant Edwards told me that a lot of the fellows were going around in Tommy uniforms. He said the Tommies behaved like good angels. Some of 'em actually took off their overcoats and gave 'em to our fellows. Some brotherly act, that!"

"Oh, this is my same old uniform. I'll tell you later how I came through with it! We four fellows were all lucky. You can't imagine how bully everyone's been to us," glowed Roger.

"Sure, I can. I've had fine treatment myself." Jimmy wagged an emphatic head.

"We'll have to start now." Roger glanced over the crowded platform. "Who's in charge of your men?"

"A rattle-head named Blazes," Jimmy replied solemnly, then burst out laughing.

"I'm not surprised. I don't see anything to laugh at, either. I'll bet you've handled them splendidly. How many are there?"

"I did the best I could, but I'm not so much. There are thirty fellows besides little Jimmy. I was the only one above the rank of private in the crowd, so it was up to me to get busy. We don't look much like Sammies. Not a uniform in the crowd."

"So I noticed. You must have all been in the water."

"Yes, we were picked up by a trawler. I'll tell *you* the rest later, too. Now I'm going to get my bunch together and call the roll. After that it's up to you."

Side by side the two bunkies elbowed their way through the crowd that still surrounded the new arrivals. The men of the squad sent by the K. O. to the station were also busy talking with the oddly-clothed Sammies. Several of the detail had found lost friends among those who had come from L——.

Jimmy's stentorian "Attention" broke up the impromptu reception. The men instantly responded to the order of their youthful commandant.

Very pleasantly but with decided firmness the young sergeant requested the crowding civilians to step back in order that the men might line up on the platform. Then he called the roll.

With every man present to answer to his name he turned his detachment over to Roger and soon the way-worn travelers were marching away from the station toward headquarters.

During their short march through the narrow streets toward the private residence where the commanding officer and his staff had taken up temporary abode, the little company was wildly cheered by throngs of people that lined the walks on either side of the streets through which it passed.

"My orders are to march you straight into the house," Roger told Jimmy, coming up to him as he walked beside his detachment. "The K. O. has a whale of a parlor to roost in. He wants to see all the fellows at once. He knows all about how many of you there were. He knew about you, too. He told me you were to be on this train. Pretty fine in him, wasn't it?"

"You bet. The Red Cross officers wired their station about us," replied Jimmy. "Their captain was to inform Major Steadman. I guess they must have mentioned my name. Don't see why."

"See you later." Roger hurried back to his own place as commander of the escort detail.

Presently a little line, very oddly appareled for soldiers, filed into the big room devoted to the use of the commandant.

There were tears in Major Steadman's eyes as men grouped themselves before the K. O.'s desk.

Though there was no attempt at military formation, owing to lack of proper space, every man stood respectfully at attention.

The Major had risen as they entered. Now he addressed the returned Sammies in tones that vibrated with intense sympathy.

"Men," he began, "you have passed through a disaster which I had hoped from the beginning of the voyage might not fall to the *Columbia.* It is an unspeakable relief to me to see you here, safe and sound."

The major then went on to express his sympathy for the hardships suffered and thanked the survivors for the fortitude with which they had met disaster.

He next informed them that they would be well looked after by the United States Government and that new clothing and equipment would be issued to them as soon as possible. For the present temporary lodgings had been found for them to which they would be conducted at once.

Nothing further would be required of them that day. In the morning they were to report at a given hour to the adjutant's headquarters, there to receive instructions regarding their future movements.

Consulting a typed list on his desk he assigned the castaways to the various lodging places which had been arranged for on learning their number and the time of their arrival.

This time Jimmy's detachment forebore cheering the speech maker. They would have liked to vent their gratitude in wild hurrahs but

military repression clung to them in the august presence of their K. O.

So they contented themselves with simply looking their utter appreciation and saluting in their snappiest manner on the last word of the major's speech.

Detailed to escort the men to their lodgings, Roger left the room with a whispered injunction to Jimmy to wait until his return.

Jimmy had business of his own with the K. O. and thus intended to linger after the others had gone.

Had he not intended to do so he would have remained there just the same. Major Steadman had business of *his* own with Sergeant James Blaise.

"Remain a moment, Blaise," he commanded as the big room began to empty itself.

Standing a little at the right of the desk, Jimmy saluted and stepping a couple of paces nearer came to attention.

"Well, Blaise." The K. O.'s eyes grew very friendly. "You and your men look as though you had seen very rough sledding. I wonder that any of you came safely through it. I wonder, too, that so many of you managed to come through with scarcely a scratch. Some of our men are still in hospital, suffering from the effects of exposure. A few have broken legs and arms. Not many, though. I understand you and those men who have just left were

picked up by a trawler. I understand, too, that you have kept these men together and looked out for them ever since you were landed on the Irish coast. Good work, Blaise."

Very red in the face, Jimmy was staring at the K. O. in undiluted amazement. How had Major Steadmen managed to learn so much?

"I was the only officer, non-com or commissioned, in the crowd, sir," he explained.

"So I was given to understand."

The major, it seemed, was given to understand a great deal, Jimmy thought. Suddenly it dawned upon him whom he had to thank for the major's great understanding.

"The sly old fox," was his mental reflection. He now knew that Lieutenant Edwards' telegraphic despatch had contained more than the mere mention of his name. "I'll bet it cost him some coin to string off all that stuff about me. Hope it did."

Jimmy appreciated the lieutenant's kindly effort on his behalf. At the same time he was not specially pleased over it. He wanted no praise for the little he had tried to do.

"I am glad you think I did good work, sir," he said.

Hesitating for an instant he went on boldly.

"I think this way about it, though, that I don't need to be commended for doing my plain duty, sir. I met two fine Red Cross men to-day. Both Englishmen. They told me some of the

things they've been through. It made me feel as though I was a pretty small toad in this big war puddle. When I've shown myself to be as useful as they've been and are, then maybe it will seem to me as if I'd really done something. Just now I feel well, rather humble."

Before the K. O. had time to make further remark, Jimmy continued hurriedly, "I have something of special interest to report to you, sir."

"Very well. Let me hear it."

"It's about that man who was a prisoner on the *Columbia.*"

Rapidly Jimmy recounted all that had happened to him on the night of the disaster. Beginning with his strange encounter with the wireless operator, he ended with the affair at the water front of the little Irish village.

"It seemed pretty tough to me, sir, to be following along behind that traitor's body as though he'd really been of some use in the world," Jimmy ended rather disgustedly.

"A most amazing state of affairs, all around," commented Major Steadman. "As it happened, Blaise, this very man who went overboard off the trawler was being watched by two of our men on board the *Columbia.* The other wireless operator had noticed several peculiar actions on the part of this man. When I questioned him after that first U-boat scare, he told

me about them. He had not spoken to anyone as they were not tangible enough to warrant it in his opinion.

"He never caught the fellow, Philip Haines was the name he went by, sending an unauthorized message. Had the *Columbia* been spared, he might have done so before we made port. It is difficult to say whether or not the traitorous act of this Haines was responsible for the torpedoing of the *Columbia*. We shall probably never know.

"As for the man you believe to be the father of this Haines, who knows what became of him? The corporal of the guard and two of the men on guard duty that night are still missing. I have been able to gain no information on the subject. I trust this Black went down with the ship."

"I hope so, too, sir. He deserved to die like a rat in a trap. Whenever I think about our fellows it makes me heartsick. I was afraid I'd lost my four bunkies, but they are all safe. I've certainly a lot to be thankful for."

"Several of your comrades have been asking headquarters for news of you ever since we landed here," informed Major Steadman. "One of them brought me a message from an officer, so I put him in charge of a detail to go to the train."

"It was fine in you, sir. Corporal Barlow is my best bunkie. I'd like to know very much,

sir, what happened to *you* after the ship was torpedoed."

Jimmy was not sure of the propriety of his remark, but he ventured to make it, nevertheless. The K. O.'s evident friendliness toward him screwed his courage to the point of saying it.

"I was one of the last to leave the *Columbia,*" was the grave answer. "Several officers and myself went overboard at the last minute, and were picked up by a trawler."

Jimmy stared at the commandant, his gray eyes speaking volumes. Here was a K. O. worthy of loyalty for all time to come.

"I'm glad you're my K."—hastily correcting himself—"commanding officer, sir."

And Major Steadman treasured this halting compliment as one of the highest he had ever been paid.

CHAPTER XXII

IGGY MAKES A CONFESSION

"WHY the mischief don't they get here?" grumbled Bob Dalton. "Let's go out and look for them."

Three young men, wearing the olive-drab uniform of the United States Army, stood outside the gate of a quaint, rambling, one-story cottage, their eyes anxiously scanning the road ahead.

"Better not," counseled Franz Schnitzel. "We may miss them. Old Rodge said to stay here till he came back, bringing our lost Blazes with him."

"I shall of the happiness pretty well die!" exclaimed Ignace So Pulinski. His usually stolid face was radiant. "Soon to see Jimmy, my Brothar! It is too much!"

"Who ever heard of anybody dying 'pretty well'?" jeered Bob. "Better not die dead until Blazes gets here, Iggy. If you do, you won't see him, you know."

"So-o!" Igance stared at Bob, then chuckled. "Now you make the fon," he protested. "I no care. So is it that I am the too happy."

"So is it," agreed Bob.

This time he was in earnest. There was a suspicion of shakiness in his tones as he repeated Ignace's pet phrase. Though only a night and part of a day had passed since Jimmy Blaise had left his bunkies for that interrupted stroll on deck, it seemed years to his chums since last they had seen his merry, boyish features.

Less than an hour before Roger Barlow had passed the cottage on his way back from escorting several men of Jimmy's detachment to quarters. Though on duty he had taken time to rush hastily into the little house with the jubilant news of Jimmy's return.

All four Khaki Boys had spent the greater part of their day since landing in going back and forth from headquarters to the station in a vain quest for news of Jimmy Blaise. Heartsick and worn out from the dreadful happenings of the previous night, Roger had urged Schnitzel, Bob and Ignace to go back to Margaret O'Rourke's cottage for a brief rest. He volunteered to remain close to headquarters and keep his eyes and ears open for information. Later, one of the others could relieve him and so on until bedtime.

Hardly had the three Khaki Boys left him, not far from headquarters, when a passing lieutenant spied him and sent him straight to Major Steadman with a message.

As it happened Roger was precisely the man the K. O. happened to need. A train was then on the way to L—— bearing a party of rescued soldiers, he stated. Roger was then ordered to take a small detail of selected men to the station to meet that train. He might have told the major that he intended in any event to meet it. Being a discreet soldier he saluted and was about to withdraw when the major called him back.

"You are one of the men who was asking for news of Sergeant Blaise," he stated, bending a quizzical gaze on Roger.

Looking Roger over, the major had identified him as one of the four men who had been haunting headquarters.

"Yes, sir." Roger's heart almost skipped a beat.

"He's on that train."

A kindly gleam had shot into the major's eye as he spoke.

"Thank you, sir. I'm very glad to know it."

Again soldierly discipline had conquered Roger's desire to grab the K. O.'s hand and shake it hard. In a daze of happiness he had left the room to take command of the detail that was to go to the station.

Thus it was that Roger and Jimmy had met again after what had seemed to them an endless separation. While Jimmy was closeted with the K. O., Roger had been busy on escort duty. Taking time only to acquaint his bunkies with the glorious news he had hurried back to headquarters, expecting to see Jimmy outside and waiting for him.

No Jimmy was to be seen, however.

Wisely concluding that he was still with the K. O., Roger posted himself outside the gates of the large house which a wealthy citizen had offered as a temporary shelter to Major Steadman and his staff.

Though the same wind was abroad that had driven Jimmy's detachment inside the station of the little village, Roger was impervious to it. He would have waited there had the rain been coming down in torrents.

"Brrr! It's good and cold!" was his only complaint, uttered half aloud. "But just look who I'm waiting for."

In due course of time Jimmy appeared with: "I guess you thought I was lost all over again. You can't lose Blazes."

"I knew you were still visiting with the K. O.," grinned Roger. "Come on; let's beat it."

"Wait till we get out of sight of headquarters. Then watch my speed."

Very decorously the two young Sammies swung down the dirt road, an Irish street, for

a distance of what would be almost a city square.

"Now!" Roger caught Jimmy's arm. "Four times double-quick, and away we go!"

Away they went at a mad pace that made the natives stare in passing. No one made any objection, however. The town was open to the Americans to do pretty much as they chose.

Halfway to the cottage they encountered a joyful delegation of three who had raced out to meet them. In the middle of the dirt road a reunion took place that none of them ever forgot.

"Oh, joy! Oh, boy! Where do we go from here?" chanted Bob when the first effusion of greeting had subsided.

"We're going to the humble cot of Mrs. Margaret O'Rourke, may the saints presarve her," declared Roger gaily. "Jimmy Blazes is going to sit in front of that big open fireplace and get properly toasted by us and by the fire."

"Yes, and we're all going to gather around that same comfy old Irish stove with blazing Blazes and have the biggest talk-fest that ever took place in ould Ireland," decreed Bob.

"So shall I by Jimmy sit," announced Ignace. "I think never to him again see. Now have I see, so is it the great day since I alive."

"You may hold his hand, Iggy." Bob beamed patronizingly on Iggy, who eyed him with great disapproval.

"No, never I do that," he expostulated. "Mans never the hand mans hold only to the shake an' let him go. So is it."

"Some little etiquette, our Iggy knows," teased Bob. "All right, Iggins. Jimmy may hold *your* hand."

"Like fun I will," grinned Jimmy. "I never hold hands except with my girl, so I'm out of the hand-holding game."

"Here we are. Now watch Mrs. O'Rourke come out and do the honors. Oh, she's been waiting for you, Blazes, my boy. She knows all about you."

By this time they were inside the gate and walking up the irregular path to the little cottage.

Surely enough, Mrs. O'Rourke was on the watch. Flinging open the door she appeared on the step, and though middle-aged, her hair partially silvered, the Khaki Boys thought she made a pretty picture as she stood there, her fresh-tinted Irish face aglow with welcome.

"And is this the Jimsy you do be talkin' of all the day?" she greeted. "Sure, he's a fine souljer bye, an' its mesel' that will be after kissin' of him on the chake!"

This she promptly did, to the great glee of his Brothers and Schnitzel. His color high, Jimmy promptly returned the salute.

"Yer a mither's oun bye," was Margaret O'Rourke's delighted opinion, and from that on

Jimmy became the established favorite in the O'Rourke household.

"I do be tellin' yer frinds that I have wan bye of me own fightin' in the trinches," she informed Jimmy with a sigh, as she towed him into a big, bare, spotless room, the chief furniture of which was a hand loom, a queer, open, many-shelved cabinet filled with dishes, a plain, old-fashioned table and several wooden chairs.

A large fireplace took up nearly a whole side of the room, while drawn up in front of it were five queer low wooden stools.

Mrs. O'Rourke had been getting things ready for the talk-fest it seemed. Evidently she had no intention of intruding upon it, but bustled out into the adjoining kitchen and was seen no more for a time, though the sound of her voice raised in a hauntingly wistful Irish folk song floated in to the Khaki Boys as they gathered round the fireplace.

The great talking bee was begun by Jimmy, though much against his will.

"You go ahead and spill every last thing that happened to you from the minute you left us to go on deck," ordered Bob.

"But I *know* what happened to Blazes," protested Jimmy. "I'm crazy to hear what you fellows ran up against."

"Nothing doing—yet," was Bob's firm denial. "It's up to you."

"All right. Here goes."

Jimmy's story created a hub-bub from the moment he began it until he ended. He was frequently interrupted on all sides by astonished ejaculations, questions and comments.

"It beats Nick Carter all hollow!" exclaimed Bob when, the exciting account finished, Jimmy leaned back rather wearily.

In fact, he leaned so far back he tipped over, stool and all, and scrambled to his feet looking extremely sheepish.

"Confound that stool!" he exclaimed, laughing a little. "I forgot it had no back."

"Your own back has gone back on you," was Roger's solicitous cry.

Darting across the room, Roger picked up the one rocker in the room, an odd-looking affair, but promising comfort. Carrying it to the fireplace he shoved to one side the treacherous wooden stool on which Jimmy had been sitting and deposited the rocker in place of it.

"Here, Blazes; have a chair," he invited, but with a touch of purpose. "You can't tip this over unless you try pretty hard. You ought to turn in, but I know you won't, so this is about the best I can do for you."

"Oh, now——" Jimmy protested.

"Dump him into it," directed Bob.

Immediately willing hands grabbed Jimmy and performed the "dumping" process.

"Before we start telling our own troubles, I'd like to know one thing more, Blazes, about

these two Boche hyenas you got into a mix-up with," declared Bob, as the five bunkies settled down again before the fire. "What's going to be done about this affair?"

"I don't know." Jimmy shook his head. "It's up to Major Steadman and the British Intelligence Office, I suppose. Before the K. O. let me go to-day he made me sit down and write a report of the whole thing. That's what kept me so long at headquarters. I slammed it through as quickly as I could, but it took time, just the same."

"I don't see that there's much to do," offered Schnitzel, eyeing Jimmy reflectively. "With the son canned for good and the father supposedly canned there are no defendants left in the case."

"It's all rather intangible," commented Bob. "I mean what happened on shipboard. We're sure that this Black was guilty of trying to blow up the bridge at Camp Marvin. Blazes' testimony would probably have convicted him of that charge. But we don't know that he and his son hatched and carried out the plot to torpedo the *Columbia*. It looks as though they did. Still that U-boat that torpedoed her may have been sneaking around on its own."

"I'm afraid the thing will never be sifted to the bottom," deplored Roger. "It will be brought before the British and U. S. Government, of course. Very likely a description of

this Black will be posted with the secret service men of both countries, on the supposition that he may have side-tracked the drowning act and is still a live one. If the son hadn't jumped overboard, you had a case of your own against him, Jimmy. He tried to murder you."

"It's saved you a good deal of chasing around, Blazes," Schnitzel pointed out. "If the *Columbia* had landed her prisoner, you'd have had to testify against him in England. If he'd been extradited on the bridge charge, you might have had to go back to the States. Anyway, you were due to give testimony against the son. Of course, we can't say how the thing would have been handled. It might have kept you on the go a good deal and again it mightn't."

"I was afraid it would tie me up so that I couldn't go on to the front with you fellows. It worried me like sixty. I kept wishing I'd never set eyes on either of those curs."

Memory of the traitorous pair clouded Jimmy's face for a moment.

"You see," he continued tensely, "I wouldn't have it that you guys had gone under to stay. I'd been keeping up my nerve all along until I went down to the water front. That gave me some jolt until I saw it wasn't old Bob those fellows had fished out of the sea."

"You must have enjoyed trailing along behind that stretcher," satirized Bob with a short laugh.

"It was *fierce.*" Jimmy scowled, then his face cleared suddenly.

"Those Red Cross men thought I was crazy, I guess, until I wised 'em to a few things," he said. "Now let's drop it. I want to hear about what happened to the rest of the gang."

"Let Bob tell it. Story-telling's in his line." Roger cast a mirthful glance toward Bob.

"Certainly, Bobby can tell stories. But only nice, perfectly true stories." Bob favored Roger with a withering glance, which bespoke his opinion of the latter.

"Then tell one now," Jimmy commanded impatiently.

"All right. To begin with, we hadn't started to get ready for bed when the grand slam came. After you went out we sat there talking. Finally, Schnitz looked at his watch and said it was time for Call to Quarters. I said I guessed I'd take off my shoes, and just then Call sounded. I had one shoe partly unlaced when all of a sudden there came a horrible crash, and I pitched forward on my face.

"We were all banged flat on the floor by it, but we scrambled up pretty quick, for we guessed what had happened. We got into our overcoats and made a grab for our life belts just as the gong began to ring. We stopped to shake hands all around, then beat it for our stations.

"Yours was starboard and so was mine. So

I hoped I'd see you, but I didn't. Schnitz and Rodge were stationed on the port side. So was Iggy. Just as we all beat it, Rodge called to me over his shoulder to watch for you, and that he and Schnitz would try to get a line on old Iggins.

"That's the last I saw of them until I met them in L———. I was one of the last fellows to climb into a life boat. I tried to hang back, but it was no use. A lieutenant caught me at it, and hustled me over the side and down the ladder. We pulled away before the destroyer came up to starboard. It was so dark you couldn't tell who was who in the life boat. I kept hoping you were in it with me. I didn't want to be rescued if you weren't.

"When the yell went up to 'Stand Clear,' our boat was quite a little way from the *Columbia.* After the destroyer beat it, she cruised around and picked us up. It was funny, but I hardly got my shoes wet. Had my money belt on, so I was all O. K. for coin. The destroyer brought us straight to L———, so, you see, I had a rather easy time of it. Now, Rodge, continue the yarn. It's up to you. You can tell your own troubles better than I can."

"You old rascal!" exclaimed Jimmy in pretended disgust. "I worried my head almost off about you and nearly died of heart failure down at the water front. I was sure for a few minutes that that Boche brute was you. And to

think, you never even spoiled your uniform, and hardly got your blamed old feet wet."

"'So is it,'" quoted Bob gaily. He knew that Jimmy was only too glad that he had escaped so easily. "Go ahead, Rodge."

"Schnitz and I were together." Roger promptly complied with Bob's command. "We were hanging to the deck rail for all we were worth when all of a sudden the ship heaved and we went up in the air. We thought it was all off with us. The officers were yelling to the men at the davits to lower the boats anyhow.

"They lowered 'em," he went on grimly, "and every last boat capsized the minute it struck the water. We were getting ready to jump when word was yelled down the line to hang on; that a destroyer was coming. About a minute afterward it came, and we took a long slide down the ropes to it. I lost Schnitz in the shuffle, and we didn't meet again until after we'd been on the destroyer for quite a while. Then I found him and Iggy. Poor Iggins looked like a lost soul. He'd had about the same experience as ourselves, hadn't you, old top?"

Roger turned to Ignace, who sat in blissful silence, his china blue eyes fixed soulfully on Jimmy. He could not get over the miracle of his "best Brothar's" return.

"Ye-a." Ignace sighed and wagged a solemn head.

Reluctantly removing his adoring gaze from

Jimmy, he straightened up. A slow smile appeared upon his lips. It widened to a decided grin.

"Now have I the little more say, I don't say him before yet. When I get on him that destroyer, so see I Schnitz. Then am I the glad him to see, but the sad 'cause never I see my Brothar. He say me, it is good some officar yell 'Destroyar him come.' So is it many men no jump by the sea. I no say nothin', only I smile little. He don't know I yell him, 'stead that officar."

"*You!*" welled the amazed chorus from three throats.

"Ye-a."

Iggy appeared to be enjoying himself hugely.

"Well, I'll be blest!" ejaculated Schnitzel. "Why didn't you tell us so long ago? You're a nice one!"

"I no like say. I no so much." Ignace borrowed Jimmy's pet expression. "Now I feel to tell."

"All on account of Blazes," murmured Bob.

"Do you realize that you did a pretty big thing, Iggy?" Roger regarded his Polish Brother with honest admiration. "You spotted the destroyer before anyone else saw it, and passed the word along that it was coming. You've earned your chevrons and I'm going to see that you get a showing at headquarters."

"No, no!" Ignace raised a protesting hand.

"You don't say him headquarters nothin'. You no un'erstan'. I no *see* him destroyer."

"You didn't *see* it?" yelled Bob. "Then how did you know it was coming?"

"I don' know. Only so I think. All time by day watch I these boat. They ver' smart. Get aroun' so nice, so fast. I think many times this, if have we the trouble, destroyer him come quick. So when I see many solder get ready jump by the sea, I think too bad they no wait a little. 'Cause I know destroyer him come. So say I and so is it."

Ignace's last words were drowned in a concerted whooping that checked the folk song Mrs. O'Rourke was humming, and brought her scurrying to the scene. She beheld four apparently demented Sammies doing a war dance about a fifth, who stood perfectly still, a wide grin decorating his usually impassive countenance.

"Faith, but these American souljers be but childer!" was her sage conclusion, as she returned to her kitchen and took up her song where she had left off.

CHAPTER XXIII

A FACE IN THE CROWD

FOR two blissful days the five Khaki Boys remained under the hospitable roof of Margaret O'Rourke. Then came the order to "move on." It was with genuine regret that they finally took leave of the kindly Irish woman. She was even more loath to part from them.

Just before starting away from her cottage, she presented each Sammie with a handkerchief of fine linen.

"These be made by me oun hands from the linen I wove mesel'," she informed them, as she presented one to each lad. "I do be robbin' me oun bye of thim, but I'll soon be makin' him mour. Kape thim wid me blessin'. Now I'll be kissin' aich of yez on the chake an' wishin' yez luck!"

This she proceeded to do, and received a series of prompt salutes in return, that left her half laughing, half crying, as she watched the

five soldier boys swing down the dirt road and out of her life.

"May the blissed Vargin be wid thim," she muttered, as she watched them not quite out of sight. Irish superstition forbade that.

It was early morning and the Khaki Boys were on the way to join their comrades in a public square of L———. From there, in four-deep formation, the entire contingent of survivors, who had found temporary shelter in L———, were to march to the station, there to entrain for Belfast.

In Belfast they would meet several hundred more of the rescued Sammies, and the entire aggregation would start that evening for England, to remain in a rest camp until they were properly fitted out again to go on across the channel to France.

Of the five Khaki Boys, Jimmy Blaise was the only one who still lacked a proper uniform. Though he had managed to get hold of a regulation American Army campaign hat, this was his only mark of the Sammie, so far as apparel went. His erect carriage and long, swinging stride, however, would never permit of his being taken for a civilian.

Arrived in Belfast, it was a matter of surprise and delight to learn that there would be only a few hours' stop there. Arrangements had been made for special trains, by which the

entire surviving lot of the *Columbia's* men would leave that night for England.

The contingent from L——— were to be escorted to the barracks of an Irish regiment. There they would be hospitably entertained that day, and escorted to the station by a detail from the barracks and a regimental band.

Jimmy had the good luck to fall in with a good-natured Irish sergeant, who insisted on presenting him with an entire extra uniform he owned. Refusing, at first, Sergeant Jimmy finally accepted it on condition that he should be allowed to return it the moment he came into a new outfit of his own.

After several days' appearance in what he termed a "rag, tag and bobtail rig," he felt quite proud of himself in his new clothes. They were rather more elaborate than he had been accustomed to wearing, but this only added to the effect. He insisted on clinging to his U. S. A. hat, however, a fact which appeared to worry his Celtic benefactor not a little.

Late in the afternoon the pleasant little session with the King's soldiers ended, and to the lively strains of a march, played by a regimental band, the Khaki Boys returned to the station.

From all over the city came detachments of Sammies, who had been aboard the *Columbia.* A whole station platform had been reserved for them. Onto it detachment after detachment

was marched by fours and then halted, while the Mayor of Belfast addressed them.

It was an earnest, straight-from-the-shoulder talk, to which the Sammies listened. The mayor made no attempt at flowery language. Perhaps, as he viewed the ranks of boyish, wind-tanned faces, and caught the flash of pair after pair of steady, fearless eyes, he glimpsed something of the gallant, daring spirit that characterizes the American youth.

"We know you will bring honor and glory to yourselves and to the United States," the mayor said in closing. "We have great faith and sure confidence that, with the help of America's Khaki Boys, the victory will rest with the Allied arms. I wish you, every one, God-speed and good luck."

Following the mayor's speech, the Khaki Boys were given a last proof of the good will of their Celtic friends. A bevy of pretty Irish girls and rosy-cheeked matrons flitted about through the ranks with dainty trays of sandwiches and tea. Finally to the majestic strains of the "Star Spangled Banner," played in unison by half a dozen bands, the entraining began.

"Take your last look at Belfast," said Roger.

He was in the same compartment with Jimmy. The two had been temporarily separated from their bunkies, due to the order in which the men had entrained.

"I'm looking."

The window of the compartment open, Jimmy was leaning forward, his head half out.

"I don't wonder——"

His speech ended in a sudden, quick gasping breath, that made Roger glance sharply at him. During those few days of reunion, Roger had wondered if Blazes was really as well as he insisted he was. He was of the opinion that Jimmy was keeping up on his nerve and would presently crumple.

"What's the matter, Blazes? Are you sick?"

Appearing not to have heard his bunkie's solicitous questions, Jimmy was now leaning well out the window, his attention firmly fixed on a portion of the crowd farther up the platform.

Just as the train pulled out of the station, he slowly withdrew his head from the open window. In his eyes lay the dazed expression of a sleep-walker, suddenly aroused in the midst of his perambulation.

"Rodge," Jimmy's voice was low and impressive, "I saw my tiger man. The bridge fellow, you know."

"*What!*"

"I'm telling you straight. I saw him in the crowd. He was dressed like a tramp and had a cap on. I was just rubbering at the crowd in general when all of a sudden I picked him up. He was staring right at me.

"He had that awful look of fire behind ice in his eyes." Involuntarily Jimmy shuddered.

"When he saw me lamp him, he turned his head away. Then he pulled his cap down over his face, and began shoving himself through the crowd. I was watching him like a hawk, but somehow he managed to duck and fade away."

"You're dreaming," was Roger's severe criticism. "About the next stop we make you'll be imagining you see the ghost of that wireless Boche walking around on the station platform."

"Nope; he's a dead one. He'll never come back. The sea hung onto him, all right. But somehow it missed getting his father. You can't fool me on that much. Charles Black, or whatever Boche name he really has a right to, is a live one. I saw him and he saw me."

"Perhaps you're right. You seem to be sure that you are." Roger's intonation was still dubious. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Report what I saw to the K. O. the first chance I have after we hit camp. But from now on, I'm going to watch myself. This fellow will never rest until he 'gets' me. That is, if he can. I'll have something to say about it, I guess.

"Of course, there's every chance that he'll lose track of us. Maybe I'm too previous in saying he'll try to run me down. Anyway, I'm going to keep my eyes open. I'm not afraid to give my life for my country, but I'll be blest if I'll hand it over to some sneaking Boche spy just to please him."

CHAPTER XXIV

ALMOST "OVER"

"GOOD-BYE, England! Hello, France!" caroled Bob Dalton joyfully, as he stood on the deck of a moving transport that was slowly winning away from British shores.

"You won't have much sing left in you by the time we are halfway across the channel," predicted Jimmy Blaise. "This is going to be a rough crossing."

"Then I'll sing while I may," beamed Bob. "You can't scare me, Blazes. I'm an old sailor. I've been seasick, shipwrecked, and generally abused at sea. I guess I can stand the rest."

After a week's sojourn in a British rest camp, the Khaki Boys were "on the way" again, this time on the last lap of the journey to France, which had proved so eventful from its beginning.

It had been a busy week of reorganization, but now the survivors of the disaster were

again in excellent condition to "Forward March." During that time no pains had been spared to dscover the exact number of men who would never again line up for roll call. Out of almost two thousand Sammies there were not more than two hundred who had gone down to death at the hands of a degraded and inhuman foe. Though so many of these Khaki Boys were missing from the ranks, the names stood on the honor roll of American martyrs to liberty and world democracy.

All that could possibly be done for the shipwrecked Sammies had been swiftly and efficiently accomplished by their own government, and that of the other Allied powers. The Red Cross had also done more than their bit. They had labored unceasingly to help restore the forlorn Sammies to the same trim, uniformed condition in which they had gone aboard the luckless *Columbia.*

Every soldier boy who still lived to tell of that terrible disaster could now boast of at least one olive-drab uniform and a goodly amount of equipment. Whatever the Sammies still lacked in clothing and equipment, they would receive when they reached France and entered barracks, there to take the final course of training before they were sent on to the trenches.

To three of our five Khaki Boys something else other than mere equipment had been given. Light-hearted, intrepid Jimmy Blaise was on

the verge of becoming a real top sergeant. To quote Bob, "Blazes will soon be one of those rare birds who roost on top of the barracks."

Naturally, Jimmy had been surprised to learn from his commanding officer that this honor was to be his. Quite naturally, too, when congratulated by his bunkies, he clung to his old standby, "Oh, I'm not so much." But his amazement at his good fortune was not half so profound as that of Ignace So Pulinski. Iggy was about to be elevated to the long-desired standing of Corporal Pulinski.

Though Roger Barlow had declared his intention of "letting 'em know" what Iggy had done on the night of the disaster, Jimmy had forestalled him. Immediately he had reached the rest camp, he went to see his K. O., Major Steadman.

His primary object in visiting headquarters had related to the report he had to make concerning the man he had seen at the station. His standing with Major Steadman being such as to permit him a certain amount of freedom of speech, he had confided to the K. O. the story of Iggy's faith in the invincible destroyer.

Not only amused, but impressed by it as well, the major had questioned Jimmy closely in regard to Ignace. Jimmy spared no words in extolling Ignace as a good, dependable soldier. As a result of the interview, Ignace took a trip to headquarters and came out of the place in a

state of beatific happiness. As soon as he received his warrant from Washington he would be, at last, a real "corpooral."

Neither had Roger Barlow been neglected. During those first trying days of rehabilitation spent in Ireland, Roger had shown such sterling worth as to command the notice of his superiors. So while Ignace waited blissfully for a corporal's chevrons, Roger was in line for those of a sergeant.

Bob and Schnitzel were still "lowly corps," as Bob put it. That, however, was better, he declared, than being "lonely corpses." Neither man was envious of the rise of Jimmy and Roger. They took it as a matter of course, and rejoiced with the two elect.

"Schnitz and I will distinguish ourselves yet," Bob had airily declared. "You, two dubs of sarges and one corp, will live to see the day when you'll salute General Schnitz and Colonel Bob. Just give us a little time."

With the danger by sea now reduced to only one short voyage, the five Khaki Boys were sailing fast toward danger by land. They had yet to hear the thunder of the guns, and receive their baptism of fire and steel.

This last most terrible phase of the "war game" was not concerning them, as they stood on the transport's deck in the sunshine, and watched the outlines of the English coast dwindle and fade before their eyes. It was enough

that they had struck a new stretch of the Glory Road that was leading them straight to France, the Mecca of their dreams.

"Better brush up on your French, Iggy," advised Bob jocularly. "You'll need it mighty soon."

Ignace merely grinned. "So will I learn when by France I get," he said tranquilly. "Six word by Franche know I now. It is enough. Rather I stay by you who too much speak. Then need I no speak at all."

"Hurray! That's one on you, Bob!" rejoiced Jimmy. "Now will you let Iggins alone?"

"He's getting pretty sassy," complained Bob. "Still, he has faith in my gift of gab. He likes my nerve. Don't you, old Iggins?"

"Ye-a. I like. It is good that you have. So all time you mak' the fon. You are the good for him those blues."

"Those are glorious words of praise, Corporal Pulinski. Thank you. Thank you."

His hand over his heart, Bob made an exaggerated bow.

"You are the welcome."

Ignace snickered faintly.

"Iggy's right, Bob." Schnitzel's somber face lighted into one of its rare smiles. "You *are* a cheerful old scout. No doubt about it. You've lighted us all through a good many dark spots along the Glory Road."

"My, what a lot of bouquets Bobby's picking up," murmured Bob ironically.

Nevertheless, a flush of pleasure mounted to his tanned cheeks. The appreciation of his bunkies was very sweet to him.

"You're all right, Dalton, but don't let it go to your head and make you dizzy," teased Jimmy.

He was mischievously quoting Bob's oft-repeated advice to himself.

"Quits," retorted Bob gaily. "That's the time you handed me back a real Bobbyism. Seeing you all act as though you thought so well of me, I don't mind saying that I might have drawn a worse crowd than you fellows for bunkies. You all have your redeeming features. Jimmy's a hero, Schnitz is a philosopher, Rodge is Old Reliable, and Iggy's a Polish admiration society. Some bunch! Long may you wave! Now a word in closing, as our friend the speechmaker loves to say when he's getting ready to talk for the next two hours. I move that we graft Schnitz onto the four Buddies' family tree. He's been a stray long enough. From now on it ought to be the five Brothers. How's that?"

"You're it, Schnitz!" Jimmy slapped the German-American on the back. "Welcome to our city."

"So is it!" Ignace smiled seraphically. "Yet is it not the way, Schnitz on the back to

hit. He now my Brothar, so give I him the hand."

This he promptly did. Instantly three other hands were outstretched to welcome the new "Brother" to the fold.

"A Famous Family of Five faring forth to fight for France," declared Bob, who loved alliteration.

"Not only for France, but for the freedom of the world and everlasting peace," was Roger's reverent assertion.

"Right-o! We tried to do our bit in camp and by sea; now we're going to begin all over again, and try harder than ever to make good in the trenches."

Jimmy spoke with patriotic fervor.

"Amen," said Schnitzel, whipping off his hat.

Instantly four more heads were bared to the breeze. The sunshine played gently on rapt faces aglow with the divine fire of patriotism. Their eyes set toward France, already they could glimpse ahead that new stretch of the Glory Road that was to lead them to the trenches.

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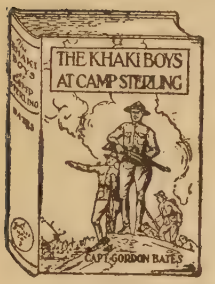

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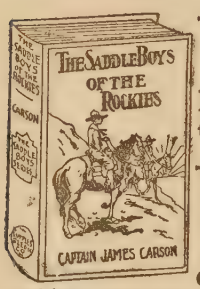

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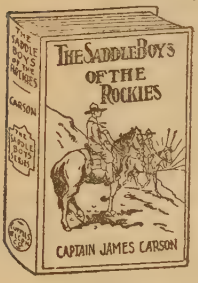

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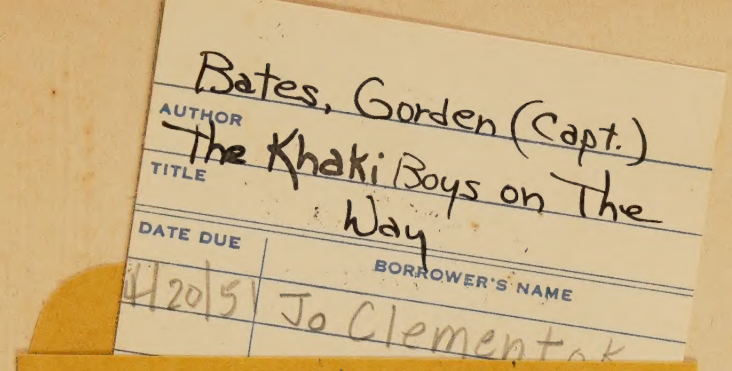
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